



URING  
CHRISTOPHER

MRS. HORACE TREMLETT



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# CURING CHRISTOPHER

BY MRS. HORACE TREMLETT



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# CURING CHRISTOPHER

## CHAPTER I

CHRISTOPHER BROWN sat one October afternoon on a small wicker-work chair in the sitting-room of a top flat in Shaftesbury Avenue, looking the picture of misery. And not without reason : for difficulties encompassed him round about, they hedged him in on every side, so that whichever way he moved he would be in trouble ; and he could think of no solution of them that would combine peace with honour, both of which were very dear to Christopher—but particularly peace.

We will admit at once that his point of view was a wrong one, and that if he had faithfully followed in the strait and narrow path, which is said to lead to salvation, he would not have been sitting on that chair chewing the cud of bitterness. For the flat belonged to Lebah Manisty, a cool-headed, sphinx-eyed girl who earned her living on the stage ; and Christopher, although he had a nice little wife and two children of his own in Uppington-on-Thames, had fallen so desperately under her spell

that his life was a burden to him. She obsessed him by night and by day, she dazzled his senses, blinded his eyes, made him a king one moment and a fool the next, in the old familiar way. But it was not familiar to Christopher, for he had been very carefully brought up, married young, and had consequently very little experience of—love, to give the thing a name which really belongs to something much better.

He looked, in his neat blue serge suit and with his carefully brushed hair, very out of place in that untidy room. The walls were a blaze of yellow, littered with rough signed sketches and unframed photographs. On the floor lay a cheap Indian carpet from which most of the colour had mercifully faded. A divan in one corner was heaped with gay cushions of all shapes and sizes, and the whole apartment wore a jaunty air of disorder and unconventionality, generally associated with the artistic temperament, and formed a striking contrast to the obviously suburban respectability of Mr. Brown.

He sat there gazing with unseeing eyes through the window, at the wet tiles of the adjacent roofs, and his face wore the gloomy, introspective look of one who wrestles with his own soul. But, as Christopher always felt much more than he thought, he was unaware of any psychic conflict within himself and only knew that he was extremely uncomfortable and unhappy. Some people are so accustomed to discomfort that they think nothing of it; they expect it, and make the best of it when it comes, thereby forging for themselves an armour

of philosophy, which frustrates the worst intentions of Fate. They also in the course of time learn many useful little dodges and devices for escaping trouble, or shifting it on to the shoulders of other people. But Christopher's life had lain, up to the present, in such pleasant places, that he had never needed any more deadly weapon of defence than his own naturally indolent and complacent disposition. He had evaded or avoided most of the ills to which humanity is heir, by the simple expedient of not perceiving them at all ; and at the age of twenty-eight was totally unprepared for the devastating onslaught of this Thing which had overtaken him.

If Amy had stayed at home all the summer and looked properly after him, or if he had gone with her to Folkestone, and played on the sands with the children as was his wont every other August, we should probably not have found him on this damp October afternoon in Lebah's flat. But Amy was one of those enthusiastic little mothers who believe that nobody can look after their babies excepting themselves ; and, when Dolly and Dick recovered sufficiently from their attack of whooping-cough, nothing would satisfy her but that she must take them herself to the sea for a couple of months to get rid of the last whoop before the winter set in. Christopher, being thus left dangerously to his own devices, elected to shut up the house at Uppington and live at his club in town, in order to save expense ; and it was this praiseworthy endeavour to economize which led to his undoing. For the poor man had nowhere to go and nothing to do in the evenings,

and when Jimmy Grover, who was a city nut and knew actresses by the dozen, introduced him one evening to Lebah Manisty his fate was as good as sealed.

Before he had known her a week she filled his thoughts to the exclusion of everything else ; and by the end of the month he was in a state of groveling adoration which made him look a much bigger fool than he really was by nature. He did not, however, in the least mind looking a fool. He felt that it was somehow to his credit—the hall mark of the true lover ; and he gloried in his folly almost as much as he enjoyed his yearnings and longings, telling himself that he had never until he met Lebah known the meaning either of Love or of Life itself. This period of enjoyment was very brief—indeed Christopher himself had hardly recognized it as such, so beset with hopes and fears was he—before Amy came back and put a sudden end to it. Not intentionally, for of course she had never heard of Lebah, and Christopher meant to take very good care that she never should do so ; but none the less effectually did she rope him in with those silken threads of duty, affection, and conventionality, which are the strongest assets of the good and faithful wife.

Christopher did not want to be roped in. He wished to be perfectly free and independent, so that he might be able to make a slave of himself in another quarter ; and Amy's persistent and quite innocent attentions worried him exceedingly, the more so because he dared not openly

resent them for fear of rousing her suspicions. If there was little comfort for him at home, there was less in Shaftesbury Avenue, for Lebah was one of those girls, elusive and alluring at the same time, who can neither make a man happy nor leave him alone in peace; and Christopher never knew whether he was in Heaven or in Hell, so quickly did she raise him to the one or plunge him into the other. He only knew that he could not live without her, and that he did not mean to try; and he spent much of his time in anxiously planning how he could see her, and perhaps more of it in strenuous endeavour to prevent Amy from finding out what he was up to.

But it was all very wearing to the nerves and often Christopher's heart failed him, and he wondered dismally how it would end. Almost every solution seemed a catastrophe. He felt that whether he gave up his home and family, or gave up Lebah, his sufferings, although of a very different nature, would be equally acute. It seemed that the only course open to him was to keep things going as long as possible, something like a conjurer with half a dozen balls and only two hands with which to catch them; and it made him dizzy with apprehension to think how easy it must be to drop one, and what a horrid noise it would make if it fell.

His meditations were interrupted by a step in the hall outside the door, and a moment later the lady herself entered the room, slim and insinuating in a purple satin kimono. Her face was colourless, and



framed by plaits of black hair coiled neatly round her small shapely head. Her scarlet lips wore a slightly bitter smile, and her eyes were those dark, fathomless wells of mystery, which give no indication of the soul within.

"Dear Kit," she drawled, "is it really necessary to call at three o'clock in the afternoon?"

Kit had risen eagerly and was holding both her hands in his own.

"Ah, but, Lebah, I can't keep away! I tried, honestly, after lunch to do some work. No good—I just had to shut it up and come round and see you."

Lebah disengaged her hands gently, and moving across the room threw herself into a long chair which stood by the fire.

"Well, sit down, now you're here," she said carelessly, "and make yourself at home. Pass the cigarettes, will you?"

Kit hastily opened his case and handed it to her, then lighting one for himself he sank into an arm-chair on the other side of the hearth with a sigh of relief.

"I don't know how it is, Lebah," he began, "you have a most extraordinary effect upon me. I come here seething with worry, and all that, you know, and before I've been here five minutes, it all goes and I feel so peaceful—so restful."

He gazed on her with ineffable content.

"Sweet woolly lamb," said Lebah, blowing rings to the ceiling.

"No, but seriously," he said, "I don't think you

quite realize what my life is at present. Of course," he hesitated, "naturally you don't like to hear about my wife and family, and I don't want to talk about them. But it's just this: things there are *impossible*, and I can't stand it any longer."

Lebah looked up at him speculatively, with dawning interest.

"What are you going to do, then?"

"That's just it," said Kit miserably. "I don't know *what* to do. You see when Amy was at the seaside with the children it was all right: I stayed at my club and there was no one to bother and ask questions. But since she came back—these last few weeks—it's been simply unbearable. 'Where have you been? Where are you going? What time will you be in? Is anything worrying you? Do you feel well?' And of course I lose my temper, and there you are!"

"Have you told her that you know me?" asked Lebah, watching him curiously.

"Told her!" exclaimed Kit, "of course I haven't told her. She'd be frightfully upset. In a way I feel sorry for Amy. Before I met you, do you see, I used to think there was nobody like her."

He gazed reminiscently into the fire.

"I used to potter about the house, or do a bit of gardening, or play with the kids. I suppose I was happy, in a sort of way. But now," he sighed, "it's all so different. The house is like a prison. My nerves are in such a state I can't stand the kids about; and as for Amy, of

course she can't make me out at all, and the way she *looks* and *looks* at me drives me mad."

Lebah threw him a quizzical glance from under her long lashes, but made no comment.

"All I think of," he went on, "is how soon I can see you again. I rush through at the office to spend an hour here, but I've hardly had time to look at you before it's train-time; and then I have to go back to Amy. All the evening I sit and think and brood, and wonder what you're doing in that beastly theatre, or who is seeing you home. My God, if you only knew the agony of mind I go through!"

He leaned forward, burying his head in his hands, and his shoulders heaved convulsively.

Lebah knocked the ash carelessly from the end of her cigarette on to the floor.

"The fact is, Kit," she said, "you're one of those mutton-headed chumps who try to please everybody; and it doesn't work, dear old thing."

"I know," replied Kit despondently, "but you don't realize what it is to have your heart torn in two. I'd do anything on earth to save Amy going through what she is at present; and if she ever found out the truth I believe it would simply kill her."

Lebah looked with resignation round the room.

"A happy release, I should say, if you bore her the way you do me."

She pitched the end of her cigarette into the fire with vigour.

"Look here, Kit," she began, after a short pause,



"I'm going to talk common sense to you. It's a thing I have no use for myself, but you're one of those stodgy people who can't get on without it."

Kit raised his head.

"How do you mean?" he asked anxiously.

"When I first met you," continued Lebah, "there was no talk of a wife and family. For all I knew, you were as free as I am, and so, somehow, we drifted into this. But, do you see, there's quite a lot of difference between a young man at a loose end, and one with a wife and family at Uppington."

"But I told you," interrupted Kit, "as soon as it mattered, and . . . and . . . you didn't seem to mind much."

"I did mind," replied Lebah shortly. "But you were so grateful and harmless that I hadn't the heart to send you away, and that's the truth."

"And I'm harmless and grateful still," smiled Kit uneasily.

Lebah looked straight past him.

"But now," she went on, "it's different. I can see you're making a perfect fool of yourself about me: upsetting your home and your wife; and, after all, you know you're very fond of her."

"I swear I'm not," protested Kit. "I *like* Amy, and that's all I can say; I'm certainly not in love with her in the least."

"You are," insisted Lebah with composure, "and, what's more, I don't fancy myself in the rôle of

seductive syren. I don't want other women's husbands: wrecked homes and blighted lives are not in my programme at all, even if I *am* an actress."

Kit looked at her uncertainly.

"All I want," she went on a trifle wearily, "is to be happy. I don't ask anything from anybody, and I don't want to be bothered with other people's worries."

"And you shan't be," said Kit diplomatically. "I promise you I won't worry you any more."

He rose from his seat, and kneeling down beside her took one of her slim brown hands in his own.

"Just let me see you as much as I want to and I'll do anything you wish. But don't," his voice shook and he gazed anxiously into her face, "talk like that again, will you? You don't know how you turned me over just now, Lebah. You see," he went on emotionally, "you are everything to me, the only little bit of happiness I have in life. You wouldn't take that away, would you? It means so little to you: to me—well, it's my life. I couldn't live without you, I wouldn't."

Lebah looked at him gravely; her inscrutable eyes were almost kind.

"Poor old Kit!" she said. "Do you really feel like that?"

Tears welled up into his eyes and he struggled a moment to regain his composure.

"I'm a silly ass about you," he said at length, "no good pretending to be anything else. I

wouldn't have believed I could ever feel as I do now. I thought I was a phlegmatic, serious sort of cove, but, by Jove, here I am, ready to cry like a woman at a kind word from you."

He rose hastily to his feet and pulled himself together with an effort.

"I suppose you despise me for a weak fool," he said, with an uncertain watery smile.

"I don't call you exactly weak," replied Lebah, "but you're not cut out for this sort of thing; you're too emotional, and you take yourself too seriously."

"You know," said Kit, blowing his nose vigorously, "you're perfectly right, you always are. But I'm going to turn over a new leaf. We'll just be real good pals. After all, Amy couldn't object to that, could she, even if she found out? Only I *must* see a great deal of you, I want you to let me come here whenever I can, and we might . . . what do you say if we go down to Brighton on Sunday and spend a nice long day together by the sea?"

"I don't think I could stand the excitement of it, Kit dear."

"Ah, do be nice to me, Lebah," he pleaded, "just one long day to set me up for the week. I promise you I won't bore you. So long as I can sit and look at you, that's all I want, just to be near you. Don't say no!"

Lebah considered a moment.

"After all," she said impatiently, "why shouldn't I go? If people can't look after their own husbands,

that's not my fault. All right, Kit. Victoria, isn't it? What time?"

"That's right," said Kit joyously. "There's a train at ten exactly, and we'll have a glorious day by the sea—do both of us no end of good. We'll dine at the *Crown* and catch the nine something back to town."

He rose and took up his hat.

"I suppose I ought to be off now," he said with a sigh. "I have a lot of work to finish before I leave the office to-night."

Lebah was looking moodily into the fire and made no reply.

"Good-bye," said Kit, standing beside her chair.

"Good-bye."

He bent down to her.

"Lebah, I haven't made you unhappy, have I?"

"No. Good-bye, old boy."

He stood irresolute.

"I wish I understood you better," he said.

No answer.

"I mean, I don't know whether you want me to kiss you, or whether you'd rather I didn't."

A tiny smile played round the corners of her mouth.

"It's awkward for you," she said.

"I think I'll risk it," said Kit, much encouraged.

But she held out her fingers, cool and aloof; and, after a glance at her averted face, he took them in his own and pressed his lips reverently upon them.

. . . . .

As the door closed behind him, Lebah stretched herself out like a cat in the sun.

"Oh," she yawned, "for a *Man*—a real live, violent, primitive man! How utterly fed up I am with everybody."

## CHAPTER II

THE village of Uppington was bounded on one side by the Thames, and on the three others by London suburbs ; but Uppington itself was not a suburb, and its inhabitants were anything and everything but suburban. No insult could wound their tenderest feelings more deeply than that pernicious word : it was reserved only for the lowest of the low, and no character, however otherwise noble, could survive the epithet in Uppington.

The shopping centre consisted of one long street, down which the electric trams ran, with an audacity that even after four or five years daily surprised and pained the older inhabitants. It was the custom of Uppington ladies to shop there from eleven to one every morning, in the interests of their house-keeping. The financial operations might not be extensive, and not infrequently were briefly entered in the grocer's weekly book as one tin pine chunks, 4½d., the tradesmen having earlier in the morning collected their orders from the cook, or from the mistress herself in an art pinafore. But eleven o'clock was the appointed time for shopping, and, as every one was bent on the same errand, it had become a recognized social event, with its



own rules of precedent, procedure, and etiquette. You might, indeed should, wear old clothes in the morning. A knitted coat and well-worn blue serge skirt, with a hat you had obviously—the more obviously the better—trimmed yourself, was a scheme of dress that evinced the right feeling. Silk underskirts and white kid gloves were the outward and visible sign of the bounder and the outsider, who, however, was not left long to bound outside if surreptitious inquiries as to the source of her affluence were found satisfactory ; that they were so often not so perhaps accounted for the Uppington prejudice in favour of simple attire.

The babies also took their airing from eleven to one ; their spotless prams propelled with either lofty indifference or with nervous over-anxiety by their attentive mothers, but never with anything that could be mistaken for accustomed ease. They formed naturally the chief topic of conversation, and were responsible for most of the heart-burnings and bitter feuds that existed in the village of Uppington. But not all. For, besides the maternal contingent, there was a powerful and sinister band of females who had nothing on earth to do, and endless days in which to do it. These also might be seen on the morning parade, the muscular ones armed with golf clubs or tennis rackets, and the flabby ones taking the dog for a walk. But all and sundry, mothers, maiden aunts, and mere women, were actuated by a beautiful unity of spirit on one subject. They each possessed a frank and unashamed determination to know each other's business. No

detail was too slight, nor any moment too sacred to be withheld from the common cause. Each worked with zeal and enthusiasm to elicit what she could from her neighbour, and to impart in her turn her own share of the spoil. No hive of bees—or is it wasps?—ever possessed such reliable and intimate information about its members, or was ever served more willingly and faithfully. Later in the day the distributions were made: each bee—or wasp—turning up at the At Home day of another, and adding her contribution of news to the general fund.

The system went like clockwork, and would perhaps in time have grown monotonous, excepting for the fact that everybody had something of which she was ashamed, or that she wished to hide; and it was this very human attribute that lent an alluring air of sport to the proceedings and gave zest to the chase. If Mrs. Jones refused to impart, or at least to indicate the source of her husband's income, it followed that there must be something shady about it, and the scent was strong on Mrs. J., until Mrs. Smith went up to town alone, and maintained a silence on the subject, when the pack turned eagerly on the trail of Mrs. Smith.

Some few ladies were clever in the cult of the red herring, and these lived in the odour of sanctity—till they were found out. Others, indifferent, or hardened to adversity, saw their characters torn to shreds before their eyes, and grew accustomed to the process, like eels to skinning. And, if occasionally a heart was broken or a life blighted by slanderous tongues, nobody was any the wiser,



excepting perhaps the unfortunate owner, when it was too late.

Mrs. Christopher Brown was a well-known figure in the village; her sweet, sunny smile and confiding blue eyes were to be seen wherever Uppington was gathered together. On the morning promenade she was there, with a chubby mite on either side, Dolly with golden curls and pink ribbons, and Dick, sturdy and solemn of countenance, in a well-made overcoat and good boots.

Mrs. Kit, as she was called, was such a good mother, such a devoted wife, such a capital little hostess, and so equally charming to men and women alike, that no breath of scandal or censure had so far dimmed the lustre of her popularity, and even gossip had passed her by unheeding.

However, she was only human, and her turn was coming.

In the afternoon Dolly and Dick were relegated to Nurse, and Mrs. Kit, after consulting a cryptic book, sallied forth in a suitable and becoming toilet to call on Mrs. A. or Mrs. B., according to whether it was the first Thursday or the second Wednesday.

To-day, as it happened, was the third Tuesday, and we find Mrs. Kit in her own drawing-room, preparing, as she did every third Tuesday, to dispense tea and cakes to the community. She pulled the blinds down half-way, partly to prevent the sun from fading the carpet, and partly because a shaded light suited every one better than the full glare of daylight, and she liked people to be comfortable. She opened the piano, and placed on it a piece of

music by Chaminade, the intricacies of which she had never been able to master ; this not with any intent to deceive, but because it was nice and clean, and seemed to give the piano an air of invitation to anyone who might wish to play on it during the afternoon. She moved sundry chairs, patted various cushions into a more seductive softness, and eventually, when everything satisfied her fastidious eye, curled herself up on the sofa and prepared to read till her callers arrived.

She had not long to wait. Punctually on the stroke of four came Mrs. Glynn-Evans, with her ferret's eyes and her pinned-on smile ; her double chin resting in her expensive furs — sixty guineas, so she said, but nobody believed her. After her came the two Miss Pratts, gaunt and evangelical ; Amber Martin, with a bitter smile and a vicious wit, which was forgiven her because she had such a pig of a husband ; several unassuming females who sat on inconspicuous chairs like poor relations ; and eventually that very kind-hearted and garrulous Mrs. Todhunter, without whom no party in Uppington was complete.

The small room was soon crowded, and a soft babel of tongues filled the warm, muffin-scented air. Everybody talked in a low and refined tone of voice, and listened politely to what her neighbour had to say before beginning her own remarks. Mrs. Glynn-Evans, who always had a bother with her servants, could be heard, a little shriller than anyone else in the room, discoursing eloquently on the delinquencies of the latest housemaid.

"Well, my dear, she was perfect for the first few days. I hadn't a thing to do. I helped with our bed in the morning, the others are all single ones and I let her do those alone. Then I wrote the orders on the kitchen slate, and there I was, free for the day—such a relief after the last few weeks! But on the Thursday, no, it was the Friday morning, she came down *in*, my dear, lavender stockings! 'Lily,' I said, '*where* are your black stockings?' 'Oh,' she said, 'I haven't had time to mend them.' 'Then,' I said, 'sit down at once and do so. You seem to have no idea of what is fitting in a gentleman's house.' That was the beginning."

After this episode Lily apparently went from bad to worse, but we will not harrow our feelings by following her.

"And how's your husband?" asked Mrs. Todhunter of her hostess. "He wasn't at church on Sunday. Not seedy, I hope, though with the weather we've had one can't be surprised if he was. I felt far from well myself, but I always say Church is a duty one should not neglect."

"I know," replied Mrs. Kit, pouring out endless cups of tea, "and Kit's very good about going as a rule, but last Sunday he was feeling so tired and unwell that I persuaded him to take a rest and stay at home. No, it's not his liver . . . I think perhaps he needs a change; we were away all the summer in Folkestone and he could only occasionally run down to us, he was so busy. . . . Yes, perhaps you are right, I think husbands do . . . a change of food too. I'm sure Kit works too hard."

"Does he have to work late in town?" asked Mrs. Todhunter sympathetically. "I heard, I think it was Thursday, he came down by the last train."

"Oh no," said Mrs. Kit, "at least sometimes lately he has been obliged to. He's not sleeping very well. I think he's a little run down; nothing upsets one like the loss of one's sleep, one's nerves get so out of order, don't they?"

A tiny cloud rested for a moment on Mrs. Kit's clear brow, just long enough for the observant Mrs. Todhunter to wonder what it was doing there.

And, because she was a kindly soul and a curious one withal, it weighed upon her mind as she walked with Amber Martin to the house where the next instalment of tea and gossip was to be found.

"I think Amy Brown is one of the sweetest little women I know," she remarked.

"Yes, isn't she nauseating?" said Amber with enthusiasm.

"Naughty girl," reproved Mrs. Todhunter indulgently, "you know quite well you like her as much as I do."

"So I do, but the stuffy domesticity of that household always makes me ill," said Amber viciously.

Mrs. Todhunter allowed this to pass, it was so obviously a case of sour grapes.

"I wonder what's the matter with poor Christopher," she observed; "his wife seems very anxious about him—suffering from nerves, so she tells me."

"Not really!" laughed Amber, "Kit, of all people!"

"Apparently he can't sleep. She seemed rather reticent, I thought—a little something behind it no doubt."

"Kit eats too much and doesn't take enough exercise," said Amber; "it's probably indigestion."

"I only hope it's nothing worse," panted Mrs Todhunter, Amber took such long steps and her own legs were short. "So many young people have these nervous breakdowns, and for a man with a wife and family it would be a serious thing."

She pointed out to several of her friends that afternoon what a serious thing it would be, and they all agreed that it would be particularly disastrous, because these healthy-looking people always felt everything a great deal more than those who were accustomed to being ill, and Mr. Brown, as they all knew, had never spent a day in bed in his life.

Before the week was out everybody knew that Kit was not nearly so well as he appeared, and Amy Brown was answering interested inquiries on all sides as to the state of her husband's health.

For if there was one thing Uppington loved, it was a "sad case," something that called for womanly sympathy, which was the strong suit of every woman in the place. Wrong-doers might be interesting, but were seldom wildly so, the limitations of society there being arbitrary, and opportunities for doing anything of an exciting or desperate nature being few and far between. A case of illness, however, had many excellent possibilities, and not the least entertaining of these, though one hesitates to say so, was the chance that it gave



the local doctor of making a bigger fool of himself than he had ever done before.

What it was exactly about Dr. Bennett, it is difficult to say. He was a conscientious, hard-working young man, with a long string of letters after his name, shedding lustre on his past career; but somehow he could never do right in Uppington. Every one nevertheless went to him, because he was the recognized village doctor, and because it would have been awkward meeting his wife at tea parties if they called in anyone else. But nobody believed a word he said, and most of his medicines went down the scullery sink. If his patient grew worse and died, heads were shaken sadly over his incompetence. When, on the other hand, they recovered, which they generally did, Uppington being a most salubrious spot, their delivery was attributed to their own common sense, to their unquenchable spirit, to the valuable prescriptions of their maiden aunts—but never by any chance to the skill of the doctor. Some natures would perhaps have been soured by this lack of appreciation, but not Dr. Bennett's. A genial smile always adorned his jolly round face, and his honest blue eyes were very kind and merry. Perhaps because he knew that, although every one thought him a fool, they liked him none the less for it; more probably because he did not care a row of pins what they thought so long as they paid his bills regularly.

There was one branch of his profession, however, in which he undoubtedly excelled: he was just the right man to introduce a new baby to its family;

patient and sympathetic till the worst was over, and relapsing easily into the rôle of a friendly caller by the time its mother was able to sit up and look pretty again. If he had confined his energies to these simple and always lucrative occasions he would perhaps have had a successful career, and earned the respect of his neighbours. But Dr. Bennett was unhappily convinced in his inmost heart that such matters were beneath him, and that only a perverse and unkind fate prevented him from blossoming into a celebrated specialist for obscure nervous and mental diseases. This weakness of his was well known in Uppington, as were all others that he possessed—and many that he did not—and it was therefore almost with a sense of excitement that the prospect of Christopher Brown's breakdown was discussed in certain circles; for of course it had grown in a very short time into a much more serious affair than it was when it left his wife's drawing-room on the third Tuesday.

Speculation, however, had so far little to feed on. Kit was to be seen about as usual, showing no outward and visible signs of his supposed ailment. There were, of course, not wanting those whose incandescent eyes discerned that his manner was constrained and restless, that his clothes hung more loosely than they used to do on his figure; and, what was more important, that pretty Mrs. Kit had lost something of her spontaneous gaiety, and was smiling with a sad little shadow in her blue eyes.

### CHAPTER III

SUNDAY at Elm Villa was a happy day. We wore our best frock and went downstairs to dinner. Father, instead of rushing off importantly to catch a train, made jokes and played on the gramophone. Nurse went out in the afternoon, and Mummy put us to bed. Sometimes Father helped too. But particularly we liked Sunday morning, because, as there was no hurry about breakfast, we could sit on the bed and talk to Mummy and Father, and get lumps of sugar from their tea tray. It was therefore rather a blow to be told to run away directly we arrived, because Father was getting up to catch a train. Mummy too seemed rather strange and quiet. Altogether it wasn't like Sunday at all.

Kit had tried several times during the week to break the news gently to his wife that he proposed spending Sunday away from home, but without success. It seemed an easy thing to say, off-hand, casually: "I think a sea-breeze would do me good—rather have an idea of running down to Brighton on Sunday." But somehow it would not get itself said. Amy quite unconsciously



headed him off every time he thought he saw a suitable opening. She had an ingenuous and terribly annoying way of putting a spoke in a fellow's wheel, especially lately ; one might almost imagine that she did it on purpose, but that would be to admit that she had a good and sufficient reason for doing so, which Kit felt very sure she had not.

When therefore he awoke on Sunday morning the words had not been spoken ; and every one who knows that woolly lethargic frame of mind that precedes the early morning cup of tea will realize his predicament. It is perhaps the worst hour of the day in which to prevaricate, to put up a bluff, even to invent excuses. He decided to wait until tea was over.

Amy, lying beside him in her white frills and pink ribbons, looked very sweet and rosy, her golden plaits tossed on the pillow. He felt himself a perfidious monster to deceive such dear innocence, and hated the necessity. Bed, also, was very warm and comfortable, and Brighton cold, and far off . . . yet Lebah waiting alone on the platform at Victoria . . . it was unthinkable. The horrid thing had to be done.

"By the way," he began, in a voice which did not sound nearly so casual as he had expected it to—Amy was all attention, her blue eyes turned limpidly upon him—"I think I shall . . . I believe, do you know . . . a sea-breeze would do me good."

"I know it would, darling," said Amy ; "I've been thinking for some time past that you needed

a change. Could you manage it, do you think, at the office? "

"Oh . . . I only meant a . . . er . . . mm . . . run down to Brighton or somewhere for the day."

"Rather a rush," said Amy, "but still, if you think."

Kit sat up in bed, rejoiced that the worst was over. All was plain sailing now.

"Yes," he said, "I feel like it. I shall run down and have a nice quiet day by the sea and come back to-night—it will do me a world of good."

"To-day!" exclaimed Amy, "Sunday? "

"Why not? it's the only free day I have."

"Yes, of course," replied Amy thoughtfully, "I daresay I could arrange. Nurse wouldn't mind for once, I could explain that you had only just decided to go."

Kit felt a strange cold silence growing over him.

"What train should we have to catch?" asked Amy, now thoroughly interested.

"I . . . er . . . as a matter of fact . . ." stammered Kit, "I . . . thought . . . I'd just run down by myself . . . do you see? "

Amy stared at him in amazement.

"Alone! don't you want me to go with you? "

"Did you particularly want to go?" inquired Kit uneasily.

"No," said Amy, still looking at him, "not if you don't want me to."

"It isn't that I don't *want* you," explained Kit effusively. "What I mean . . . if it weren't

Sunday . . . I mean Brighton's not much of a place on Sunday."

He became unhappily aware that Amy's eyes were riveted on his right cheek and that if he turned a fraction of an inch he would meet them and be utterly undone. The thought of Lebah waiting disconsolately at the station, perhaps even indignantly, gave him courage, and he sprang resolutely out of bed.

"Look here, Amy," he said, "if you don't mind I'd rather go alone," he began gathering up some of his clothes to take into the bathroom; "I shall be all right, don't you worry about me."

"Kit," said Amy in a hard little voice, "you aren't going to meet anyone there are you?"

"No, Silly, of course not," replied Kit, pleased to be able to tell the truth.

"It seems so odd to me," said Amy, "going down there alone all day, where you don't know a soul to speak to. It looks as though . . . you . . . wanted to get away from us all . . . from me perhaps." She was sitting up in bed, gazing at him with troubled eyes. "Is that it?" she asked pathetically.

"Oh Lord!" sighed Kit impatiently, "what a *fuss* you make about every little thing, Amy. Just because I feel I want a breath of sea air, you argue, and bother and fuss. Why can't you leave me alone?" he asked irritably. "You don't seem to realize that a fellow can't always be tied to your apron strings—you *do* make me so wild!"

Tears in the blue eyes. Amy huddled down under

the clothes without a word. She too had looked forward to Sunday: chickens were ordered for dinner, and the sort of cream pudding he loved; and now he was going away to Brighton, to get away from it all!

No wonder Dolly and Dick felt that something was wrong as they stood there on the threshold in their clean pinafores.

Even Kit, as he shaved hastily in the bathroom, felt that the day had not started auspiciously. He tried to picture himself strolling along the promenade, all eyes turning for a second glance at the striking girl beside him—his girl. Tried to imagine a gay little lunch, *tête-à-tête* in the bay window of the Crown Hotel; the long, lazy afternoon; the cosy, intimate dinner together. But it was hard work at that time of the morning and he soon gave it up.

When he was dressed he put his head in at the bedroom door:

“Good-bye, Amy, I shan’t be late.”

A muffled good-bye came from under the bed-clothes.

He hesitated a moment, then turned silently and went downstairs and out into the street.

As the door slammed behind him, a fugitive and guilty feeling possessed him: a sense of freedom, of escape from bondage, together with a sick remorse that he had left Amy crying under the bed-clothes. He felt that he would like to go back and comfort her, yet at the thought of her in his arms his eyes hardened and he hurried along faster. But not

quite fast enough, for just as he reached the station the train steamed out of it without him.

He found that there was another in half an hour, which if luck favoured him might possibly get him to Victoria by ten o'clock. But there would be no time to snatch breakfast at the refreshment-room as he had intended to do, neither was there time to go back and get some. So he sat down to wait in the chill and empty station, with only his reflections to keep him company, and wondered, as many a man has done before him, whether the game was worth the candle.

Down at Brighton the sun was out, shedding his most fatherly smile on the cheery cosmopolitan crowd that thronged up and down the promenade. No one could resist his genial influence. Thin, anxious little Jews grew quite affable; fat ones waxed hilarious, and their luxuriant, overdressed wives expanded visibly. Peppery Anglo-Indians lost something of their yellow irascibility and their livers ceased from troubling. Germans grew more talkative and pompous in their tight, unearthly clothes, and even the robust yet exhausted-looking ladies taking an airing in bath-chairs seemed to lose a little of their hauteur.

Tucked into a cosy corner of one of the shelters was Lebah, very happy indeed, or her looks belied her. She was talking in her low, seductive voice to a gloomy, taciturn young man, who was seated beside her, and prodding the pavement with his walking-stick with an air of restrained ferocity.



He was perfectly dressed in quiet, well-cut clothes, and his boots and gloves were expensive and inconspicuous. He had dark green eyes with yellow specks in them, and his expression was sardonic, almost sinister. He seldom smiled, but occasionally, when something amused him, emitted a short bark, showing his teeth for a moment like a vicious horse.

"How odd," Lebah was saying, "to find you here; when did you come down?"

"Yesterday," replied Captain Vibart. "I only got home from Nigeria on Monday. What are you doing here—staying with people?"

"No, only down for the day," said Lebah. "I didn't mean to come alone . . . but . . . my friend lost the train, and I thought, having got so far, I wouldn't turn back."

"Strange thing," remarked Jack Vibart, "women never can manage to be in time for anything."

"Yes," said Lebah faintly, "they're rather feeble, aren't they?"

"It must be five years since I saw you last," said Jack; "you were a flapper then, studying in Paris, with your hair tied up in a bow as big as your head."

Lebah laughed softly.

"Very serious I was in those days—used to practise by the hour."

"But I never thought for a moment you'd stick it long," said Jack, "you're far too bright for that sort of school-marm business."

"After that," continued Lebah, "I tried a *pension*, but such a lot of old cats you never saw. I couldn't stand it, so I took a

studio with Stella Patmore. You remember Stella ? ”

“ She did you no good, I’ll swear,” grinned Jack.

A cloud crossed the girl’s face.

“ I didn’t stay with her long,” she said briefly. “ After that I went to Italy for three months to pick up the accent, I thought at that time I should be able to get into grand opera ; but of course you can’t, unless you have influence, or money.”

“ And did the young man go to Italy too ? ” inquired Jack, after a pause.

Lebah smiled to herself. “ There wasn’t a young man,” she said serenely.

“ I heard something,” continued Jack indifferently, “ about a duel between an Italian and a Frenchman.”

Lebah’s mind worked swiftly.

“ That was afterwards,” she said.

“ After the three months ? ”

“ No . . . while I was there, of course,” she replied, wondering how much he knew.

“ To bring two men up to the fighting stage in three months was a very creditable performance,” remarked Jack tentatively.

Lebah, however, refused to be drawn on the subject and gazed meditatively out to sea.

“ What were you doing in Nigeria ? ” she asked presently.

“ Oh,” said Jack laconically, “ drifting about.”

“ The climate is rather awful, isn’t it ? ” persevered Lebah.



"Putrid."

Another long pause.

Then Jack bestirred himself to great pronounced conversational effort.

"At Las Palmas," he began, "I bought one of those," he looked vaguely and resentfully round the horizon, "... silk ... padded ... dressing-gowns, do you call 'em, for an old aunt. That's really why I came down here yesterday. I got a cab and took it along, and they said she'd been dead and buried a month; so I had to take it back again."

"Haven't you any more aged relations?" asked Lebah, smiling at his harassed expression.

"I believe there's another somewhere, with religious mania. I don't know if they keep her chained up. I must find out. Or," he said with sudden inspiration, "would you like to have it? Do take it, will you?"

"No, thank you," chuckled Lebah, "give it to the religious maniac."

Jack thought how charming she looked when she smiled, and fixed his green eyes upon her with renewed interest.

"I say," he began, "is there any reason why you shouldn't come and lunch with me at the *Royal*? I'm putting up there?"

"N . . . no," hesitated Lebah, mentally weighing the absent and devoted Kit, and finding him wanting in the scales with this fascinating newcomer. "I think not."

Jack's observant eye was upon her.

"I don't care about fighting duels," he volunteered softly.

"To tell the truth," said Lebah in a burst of candour, "there was a man coming down, or said he might." She paused.

"If he doesn't know his own mind?" suggested Jack. "I believe they give you quite a good lunch at the *Royal*," he added.

"All right," said Lebah recklessly, "I'll come. I don't suppose he'll turn up now, and if he does . . ."

"Was he the girl who lost the train?"

"I didn't say there was a girl," smiled Lebah, "that was your own idea entirely."

Jack showed his teeth for a moment and barked.

"I see you haven't changed a bit," he said.

"Was there any need to?" asked Lebah, enjoying herself immensely.

"Not at all," said Jack indifferently. "You were a nice enough kid, if . . . you'd been properly looked after," he added thoughtfully.

They strolled along towards the Royal Hotel, neither speaking for a few moments. Lebah was trying to remember exactly what he had been doing in Paris five years before; but excepting for the fact that he was reputed rich, and took practically no notice of her at all, she could recollect nothing. It was all the more surprising that he had retained in his mind all these years such a vivid picture of her, and she hoped that whatever rumours he had heard meantime had not been of too illuminating a character.

"After lunch," said Jack, interrupting her reverie, "we might have a cab and go for a drive, unless it would bore you. Nothing else to do, is there . . . ?"

"Like to very much," replied Lebah. "I left my coat at the *Crown*—I generally lunch there when I'm down here."

"We can call and get it on the way," said Jack.

And so it happened that when Kit arrived about one o'clock at the Crown Hotel, in some anguish of spirit but with a reasonable hope of finding Lebah there waiting for him, he was informed that the lady had left her coat and would return to lunch. He reflected that if he went to meet her he would probably miss her in the crowd, and so contented himself with a cigarette and a prominent position on the doorstep.

When the cigarette had burned itself out, he had another, and when that was finished he lighted a third ; by which time the eager anticipation of the first half-hour had considerably abated, and he began to feel a slight but distinct sense of irritability, which the convivial sounds coming from within the hotel dining-room did little to alleviate. Sounds of popping corks and clattering cutlery caught his ear, and a buzz of cheerful conversation, broken occasionally by a merry laugh or a loud guffaw. The smell, too, of baked meats was very alluring to a hungry man, and he looked anxiously up and down the Parade with growing impatience.

The time passed so slowly, it seemed to him that

the sun must be standing still in the heavens, and his thoughts took a gloomy and depressing turn. Could she, he wondered, have been at the station to meet the train, and having missed him gone off somewhere else to lunch, under the impression that he was not coming down at all? Or was she perchance offended with him for having lost the train, and trying to punish him by her absence? These and many other horrid speculations filtered through his mind as he paced up and down before the hotel door, for he was by this time past that happy frame of mind when he could stand still and idly watch the passers-by.

The people began to come out from lunch. Replete and self-satisfied they sauntered past him, chatting contentedly together. He felt suddenly very sad and lonely, and with a sigh turned into the hotel and sat down to a belated lunch.

A miserable one too. The duck and green peas, which figured so attractively on the menu, proved on inquiry to be "off," and the roast beef, which was brought to him as a substitute, was that flabby and colourless sort of meat that his soul particularly loathed. He ate it, however, in disgusted silence, and so downhearted was he at the failure of all his hopes that he ordered himself a glass of beer instead of the festive bottle of wine, which the occasion ought to have demanded. A half-cold slab of gooseberry tart finished a most unsatisfactory meal, and choosing a huge cigar for consolation he strolled out into the vestibule.

The hall porter, who had taken a sympathetic

interest in his sufferings, met him there with abject apologies.

"I'm very sorry, sir, I went orf to my dinner, and there was a party come and took orf the lady's coat from orf the peg."

"What, stole it?" asked Kit anxiously.

"No, sir, oh no, the young boy was here looking after things. He says the lady was seated in the carriage; it was a gent as called for it."

"I don't believe that," said Kit. "Where's the boy?"

The boy was produced and adhered strictly to his veracious tale. The gent had stepped out of the carriage at the door, and demanded a long blue coat from orf of the peg.

"I give it to 'im," said the truthful boy, "and 'e 'olds it up to the lady, and she says 'that's the one,' and he takes it and 'elps 'er on with it in the carriage; then 'e wraps 'er up with 'is fur rug and sings out to the coachman, and they drives orf."

He looked somewhat resentfully at Kit, his sympathies being entirely with the other gent, on account of a shilling reposing in his trouser pocket, a rare windfall which he had no intention of disclosing to the rapacious eye of the hall porter.

Kit turned gloomily away. It seemed that every one's hand was against him to-day. The flavour had even gone out of the expensive cigar.

No clue presented itself as to Lebah's extraordinary behaviour, but of one thing he was determined. The carriage, according to the page boy, belonged to the Royal Hotel, and had gone in the

direction of Rottingdean ; presumably it would eventually return to the hotel, and when it did so Kit meant to see for himself the unspeakable cad who had enticed Lebah away from him, spoilt his lunch, and who filled him already with a profound and bitter animosity.



## CHAPTER IV

TWO weary hours he spent walking up and down before the Royal Hotel, a hundred yards on either side of the entrance. It seemed, he thought, not a dignified proceeding, neither was it at all entertaining, and more than once his pride prompted him to take the next train back to town. But he could not bring himself to go away without having seen, with his own eyes, Lebah driving with the interloper—if indeed it was Lebah, which he more than half doubted. And if it should prove to be that fickle girl, there were things to be said to her: reproachful things, bitterly sarcastic things, yet, his heart warned him, more than all these, imploring, beseeching things. Surely, he argued, she could not have deliberately deserted him in such a callous and cruel manner. There would be some satisfactory explanation of her absence forthcoming. See her he must. Wait he did.

At last, turning suddenly to retrace his steps, he beheld a well-appointed carriage drawn by a pair of high-stepping horses coming towards him. His heart thumped wildly as he saw her, reclining luxuriantly amongst cushions, and talking with animation to a dark saturnine man beside her.



A fur rug was wrapped round their knees, and they both wore the unmistakable air of mutual contentment that proclaims a successful party of two.

Kit instinctively slackened his pace, and in a few seconds the carriage pulled up at the hotel entrance. The man jumped out first, and something in the loose sporting hang of his coat, something in his glistening well-cut boots, struck rage and indignation into Kit's thumping heart. He knew his own coat did not hang like that, nor his boots, so carefully cleaned by Mabel in the kitchen, shine like those boots shone. Then Lebah, just touching the brute's outstretched fingers, stepped lightly to the ground. Her glance sped for a moment in Kit's direction, but she passed obliviously into the hotel. She had not seen him ! So absorbed was she in the perfidious stranger, that she had eyes for nothing else ! Kit felt a hot tide of anger surge up in his breast. He quickened his steps and walked swiftly past the closed doors of the hotel : inhospitable, inexorable doors, through which he had no right to follow her—or if he had the right, then certainly not the pluck.

Even now, although he had seen her, and was convinced of her infamy, he could not persuade himself to go back without a word with her. His heart was ready to burst within him. That she should have treated him so ! No rest for him till he heard from her own lips the reason, the excuse, both of which there must be or life was unliveable for Kit. He walked back to the Crown Hotel,

chewing the cud of bitterness. If only she had seen him, and knew that he was here, waiting and longing for her, surely her heart would be touched !

As a matter of fact, she had seen him quite plainly, much to her annoyance ; and was at that moment engaged in bidding a hurried farewell to Jack in the hotel lobby. She had just remembered, she explained, a friend recently married, and living in Brighton, on whom she had promised to call without fail.

" I'd ask you back to dine," said Jack, who had spent a quite entertaining afternoon, " but I have two fellows coming. I don't suppose you'd care to . . . or would you ? " he asked.

" No, thanks," smiled Lebah readily, thankful that he would be engaged and therefore not likely to cross her path again that evening.

She was just a little nervous as to what Kit might do, having some experience, and a very poor opinion of his self-control, and his manners when he lost it. The last thing she wanted was a meeting between the two men, at any rate to-day, when everything had gone so well. She shook hands with Jack, and tripped down the hotel steps, leaving behind her her town address and a profound impression on the usually impassive Captain Vibart.

She smiled as she went along to think how perfectly they had got on together. Jack's sardonic, gloomy humour had fascinated her, and his indifferent, casual assumption of her as an old friend had put them at once on an easy and familiar

footing. He was a welcome change, too, from the men she had known, with his wild inconsequent remarks and his masklike face, out of which his green eyes looked like those of some fierce untamed animal. Whatever had been her experiences she was not easily moved by men, though they were moved frequently enough by her; and the little, unfamiliar thrill of excitement that fluttered in her heart was an unexpected piece of good luck, which accounted for the secret, half-amused smile that played about her red lips.

When she thought of Kit, which she did only by a supreme effort, her smile faded, and she almost frowned. Something, she supposed, must be done to propitiate him, but not, she decided, very much: just enough to get him peacefully out of the way.

She walked along to the *Crown*, and there, smoking in the vestibule, she found him, wrapped in gloom.

"Well, you're a nice one . . ." he began, rising as she entered.

"Frightfully sorry," she said, not looking it at all. "I thought something had stopped you and you couldn't get down. What happened?"

"You must have known I should come," replied Kit sulkily. "I lost the train."

"Been here long?" she inquired brightly.

"Only since half-past twelve," he answered resentfully, "and I think I might have saved myself the trouble of coming at all—evidently you've been getting on very well without me."

"How do you know?" smiled Lebah carelessly.

"I saw you," said Kit, looking intently at her.

"Who's that bouncer you were with?"

"Don't call him names," said Lebah, her eyes narrowing; "he's an old friend of mine."

"Who is he?" repeated Kit truculently.  
"What's his name?"

"You and I," said Lebah coolly, "will have a row if you don't alter your tone very considerably."

"If you only knew," groaned Kit, "the day I've had, hanging about, waiting for you—hour after hour! And then to see you calmly driving with that chap, you can't wonder if I'm upset. I've never spent such a wretched day in all my life—never."

"Entirely your own fault," said Lebah not unkindly. "Why weren't you at the station? You didn't expect me to sit there all day waiting till you turned up, I suppose?"

"I thought you'd wait at the *Crown*," faltered Kit reproachfully.

"So I should have, I dare say," admitted Lebah, prepared, now that she had reduced him to a proper frame of mind, to be more amiable, "if I hadn't met Captain Vibart on the front. He asked me to lunch, and afterwards we went for a drive—nice drive too," she added.

Kit watched her anxiously.

"Just tell me one thing," he begged, "did you know he was going to be down here when you left town?"

"Gracious no," she laughed. "I haven't seen or heard of him for five years."

Kit breathed more freely.

"I've been making myself so miserable," he said, "thinking about you . . . and wondering. . . ."

Lebah glanced up at the hall clock.

"Never mind," she said practically, "it's nearly seven o'clock; order up a top-hole dinner, and the fizziest bottle of champagne in the shop, and we'll make up for lost time."

Kit looked at her doubtfully; there was something determined, almost defiant in her manner, which struck him as unusual.

"All right," he replied, trying to conjure up a smile, "you must be extra specially nice to me."

"Certainly," said Lebah cheerfully. She had no intention of quarrelling with him, and, moreover, being a lady of much philosophy, saw no reason to spoil a good dinner, even though it was to be, as she inwardly resolved, the last one they had together.

The meal, however, in spite of her convivial efforts, was hardly a success. After the stimulating society of Jack Vibart, she found Kit very poor company indeed. Moreover, as the evening wore on, and copious draughts of iced champagne raised his fallen spirits to an almost reckless pitch of gaiety, his glances of slavish devotion bored her exceedingly, and she was glad when the time arrived for them to set out for the nine-thirty train back to town.

On the way to the station she was strangely silent. But not so Kit, who had much to say of



the greatest importance. She must know the exact state of his feelings, and the precise place that she occupied in them. Why he was so entirely devoted to her, and how powerfully she affected him. What he thought and felt when she was not there, and his pitiable inability to express it all when she was. To all this and much more Lebah listened with a divine patience that inspired Kit to undreamed of heights of poetry and romance.

It was therefore a tremendous blow to him when, on reaching the train, she calmly entered a compartment already occupied by two frigid and elderly ladies. Surreptitious beckonings and whisperings were of no avail, and the train started off with a shriek into the darkness, bearing in one corner of a first-class carriage as ill-used and indignant a young man as ever travelled up to London.

By the time they reached Victoria, his anger had cooled to a deep resentment, coupled with a fierce resolve to, as he put it, "have it out with Lebah" before parting with her that night.

So, after helping her into a taxi and giving the driver her address, he nimbly hopped in beside her as the car began to move forward.

"Why wouldn't you travel up alone with me?" he demanded, laying his hand on her knee, and looking anxiously up into her face in the dim light.

Lebah's eyes flashed dangerously, but she waited a few seconds before replying. Perhaps, thought she, if it had to be done, the sooner the better.

"Kit," she said at length, in a curiously detached voice. "I'm deadly tired of you; I never want to see you again."

Kit's grip tightened on her knee: the blood rushed to his head and almost blinded him.

"My God," he breathed, "don't say that. . . ."

"I tried to tell you the other day," went on Lebah in level tones, "but you wouldn't take the hint."

Kit was making a stupendous effort to control himself, but when he attempted to speak the words choked him.

"No," he gasped, "I can't . . . I won't let you go. I've never felt like this about a woman before . . . if I lost you I would kill myself. I swear I won't live without you . . . I can't, Lebah . . ." he pleaded brokenly, "don't ask me to."

"I must," said Lebah, not unkindly. "I have to think about myself—what people will say. You get madder and madder every time I see you."

"I know I do," admitted Kit pathetically. "What's going to be the end of it all I can't think. I'm perfectly crazy about you, I think of nothing else from morning to night . . . but . . . but you won't make it any better by sending me away—I should go clean off my head."

"I'm sure I don't know what to do about you," sighed Lebah helplessly, "you must see how impossible it is for me, us to go on like this. I've honestly tried to help you, but I only seem to make you worse."



Her tone inspired Kit with fresh hope ; he leaned forward eagerly.

“ Don’t think about me at all,” he said unsteadily, “ whatever I suffer, I would go through a thousand times more if you were the cause of it. All I want is to be near you, to see you ; I don’t ask of you anything you can’t give me. If I love you, that’s my look out ; you’re not responsible for it.”

“ I am,” said Lebah, “ if I encourage you and let you make love to me ; I ought never to have gone down to Brighton to-day.”

“ And I wish to God we never had ! ” exploded Kit. “ I believe that black-eyed brute is at the back of all this—you were all right yesterday.”

“ It’s nothing at all to do with him,” said Lebah firmly.

But Kit was not convinced.

“ If he comes between us,” he said angrily, “ I’ll shoot him. Already, as it is, I hate him like poison. What right had he to freeze on to you like that all day ? You said yourself he was almost a stranger to you, you hadn’t seen him for five years. Where’s he been—in gaol ? ”

This, unhappily, was not the way to Lebah’s heart ; indeed, a more disastrous line of argument could never have been conceived. She stiffened visibly.

“ Captain Vibart is one of my oldest friends,” she said coldly, stretching a point for Kit’s further discomfiture, “ there’s no need to drag his name into a silly discussion like this. I made up my mind

some time ago that things would have to be different. I've tried to be a friend to you, but you won't keep to that; so now," she concluded resolutely, "there's nothing for it but—good-bye."

The cab was already slowing down before her door, and she prepared to rise, gathering her coat closely round her.

Kit took her two hands roughly in his own.

"Never!" he cried hoarsely, "never, Lebah. I can't let you go. Rather than that I'd . . . I'd . . . Oh, *curse* it, here we are," he groaned as the taxi came to a sudden standstill.

"Yes, thank goodness," said Lebah fervently, opening the door.

Kit followed her on to the pavement.

"I'm coming in with you," he said.

"No," she answered firmly, "stay where you are or you'll lose the last train home—and then the fat will be in the fire."

Kit dragged out his watch.

"Good Lord," he muttered, his shackles closing in on him, "I shall only just do it. I'll come and see you to-morrow."

With a distracted grip of her hand, he jumped back into the taxi and told the driver to take him to Waterloo Station and lose no time about it.

Amy, lying awake in her large bed, heard his key in the front door, heard the careful shutting and bolting, followed by a few steps on the hall floor. And then silence. She strained her ears to listen, but not a sound came from downstairs.

A long time she lay and waited—so very long it seemed to her. The street lamp went out suddenly, and left her room in complete darkness. That must be twelve o'clock, she told herself; surely Kit had dropped off to sleep in his chair. She rose quietly, and slipping on a dressing-gown crept softly downstairs in satin slippers, a pale and ghostly little figure. Along the hall she went, making no sound, till she reached the dining-room door, which was standing half-open. The light was turned low, just as she had left it; the fire had burned down to a few dull embers; and before it sat her husband, his head bowed between his knees, motionless.

There was not a sound in the room, and the deathly silence seemed to accentuate the dim gloom. Amy watched him with a strange fear at her heart. She could hardly believe that this dejected, stricken-looking man was her cheery, easy-going Kit. What, she asked herself, could have brought about such a terrible change in him—with what horrible thing was he wrestling there alone? She yearned to take him in her arms and comfort him, yet stood there afraid, afraid of some intangible horror, which she could neither see nor express in words, but which gripped her cruelly.

At length he looked up; and, seeing her, stared as though she had been an apparition.

"Kit," she said softly, "why don't you come to bed?"

He rose uneasily.

"I couldn't sleep if I did," he replied.

"Can't you tell me what's the matter, darling?" asked Amy. "I can see there's something wrong, and it makes me so unhappy not to be able to help you in any way."

"There's nothing wrong at all," said Kit impatiently. "I wish you'd go back to bed, Amy, and not bother."

"How can I help bothering," cried Amy, trembling, "when I see you looking the picture of misery, and I don't know what's the matter with you? Do you think I haven't seen, the last few weeks, how wretched you've been, so different? I don't understand it at all."

"It's my nerves," temporized Kit. "I'm sorry I'm different. I can't help it," he added wearily.

Amy went up to him and stood facing him, her hands resting on his arms, her face close to his own.

"Tell me, Kitty," she said gravely, "what were you thinking of when I came into the room?"

Kit moved restlessly.

"I can't tell you," he said, "all kinds of things—nothing in particular."

He shook himself free and began to pace up and down the floor.

Amy watched him anxiously.

"You're utterly wretched," she said, with hopeless conviction.

"God knows I am," answered her husband bitterly.

"But why . . . what for?" cried Amy in perplexity. "Have you any money bothers?"

"No."

"Anything wrong at the office?"

"No, nothing," said Kit stolidly.

Amy paused a moment, then looked up sideways at him.

"I know it's me," she said pathetically, "what it is I can't think; but I've felt for some time now that I'm not making you happy."

Kit made no reply; he had walked to the fireplace and was standing before the almost empty grate, gloomy and taciturn.

"Do you see," continued Amy thoughtfully, "the way I look at it is this: the house is yours, the money's yours, so are the children—so am I. Although I suppose it's not fashionable to say so, you are the master here, and you can do as you like. If anything is upsetting you, you've only got to *say* so. I want you to realize that and not to go on putting up with things you don't like, and being unhappy about them. As for me, do you see, Kit, I'm not one of those women who care about outside things at all. I never think about anything but you, and the children, and the house. Some women do, I know, but I never did. All my life, everything I have is given to you; and I like it to be so, it's what I was made for, and I don't want anything else." She paused doubtfully. "But of course," she went on, with a little sigh, "I expect you sometimes think me very ordinary and dull. Perhaps I ought to try and read . . . books or something," she hesitated vaguely.



"I know I'm not clever, but you once told me you hated clever women, so I've never tried to be."

Kit turned suddenly upon her.

"Amy, for God's sake don't talk like that, I can't bear it. It's nothing to do with you at all," he cried desperately, "it's myself. You can't do anything. Just let me alone, go to bed and leave me, I'll come up presently."

Amy regarded him gravely.

"There's something very strange about you to-night, Kit, you almost frighten me."

"I don't wonder at that," said Kit savagely, his endurance strained nearly to breaking point, "I frighten myself. I've got a devil in me to-night, Amy. . . . I feel like murder . . . I could strangle . . . anyone . . . for the pure love of the thing!"

Anything more alarming than these sentiments, from the lips of her amiable and peace-loving Kit, Amy had never heard. Her eyelids flickered for a moment and her thoughts flew to her two babies in bed. She darted a furtive glance at his tragic face, then summoning all her courage and common sense she smiled bravely at him.

"What a terrible person," she said lightly. "Better come along to bed before you do any damage."

Her changed tone recalled Kit to himself.

"All right," he replied, "you're a good little soul, Amy; trot away upstairs, and I'll follow you in a few minutes."

She went to the door, but looked back for a moment.

"Dick's not very well to-night," she faltered, "I thought I would sleep in the nursery with him; do you mind?"

No, Kit did not mind in the least. On the contrary, he felt a distinct spasm of relief at the prospect of sleeping alone.

"Good night," said Amy from the doorway.

"Good night."

Slowly she went upstairs, her heart beating against her ribs. She was not afraid, she assured herself, of course not afraid of dear silly old Kit; but nevertheless rather glad to pop into the nursery, and very quietly to turn the key in the lock.



## CHAPTER V

WHEN it was asserted in a previous chapter that all the Uppington ladies might be seen in the High Street from eleven to one every morning, a slight deviation was made from the exactitude that it is the aim of this veracious history to achieve.

They were not quite all there, because ten, or possibly a dozen uplifted and enlightened souls, having perceived the mutability of earthly matters, held themselves rigidly aloof and refused to be dragged or cajoled into any social intercourse outside their own small community. They took no interest in gossip, in the well-being or ill-doing of their neighbours, neither did any current news excite their imagination, because they never read the newspapers. The highest achievements of science left them cold, nor did the affairs of the Church, the Services, or the Law stir any thrills of emotion in their breasts. The only subject that they shared with their less enlightened sisters was the somewhat unsavoury one of disease, and this, paradoxical as it may sound, was because they knew that no such thing existed. Secure like limpets to the rock of their strange convictions, and

blind, deaf and dumb as that admirable mollusc to all outside interests, they pursued the even tenor of their way, serene in the consciousness of their own infallible rectitude, and touchingly faithful and grateful to their Beloved Founder and Teacher, the defunct Mrs. Baker Eddy of Boston, Mass., First Church of Christ Scientist.

It must not be thought that, because they eschewed the society of their neighbours, they disliked them in any way. On the contrary, they were filled with Love, a divine, pitying Love, which made them yearn to help and to bless, and more particularly to advise on any subject under Heaven. This last was a function for which they were especially well equipped, having received from their Mrs. Eddy, who got it straight from God Himself, the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and a clear perception of the TRUTH undimmed by the fog of human intellect. No feeble doubts ever assailed them. They never wondered in a fatuous way like the rest of us, whether God made the Earth in seven days, and if so, why? Whether the first hen laid the first egg, or the first egg hatched out the first hen. If it were necessary to be good, or merely to be careful. These and similar abstruse questions had no terrors for them, because they *knew*. Not that they could ever explain them to the limited intelligence of the uninitiated: partly because they talked in cryptic phrases, which conveyed no meaning to the outsider, and partly because they opined that nobody who had not embraced their Faith was ready to penetrate into such profound Mysteries.

This attitude, coupled with their yearning to love and to bless, rather riled the unregenerate, who unanimously refused to be loved, blessed, or advised ; so that there was seldom much doing outside the confines of their own environment. Of course if people refused to be loved and blessed, if their hearts were hard, and their noses turned up, there was nothing for it but to leave them severely alone to grope in the outer darkness, under the ban of Scientific disapproval.

In addition to this, there was another excellent reason for the exclusiveness of Christian Scientists, and a more human one. Owing to the wondrous complexity of their ideas, they had a bewildering way of reversing the established order of things. What we call real, such as measles spots, they pronounced unreal, and would argue to any length that the spots were only in one's imagination. That is to say, that if they were not in your mind you could not know that they were on your skin, which is the same thing as their not being there at all, or words to that effect. But, on the other hand, the power of thought was unlimited. While they did not fear measles, they dreaded with an exceeding dread the thought of measles ; and should your mind stray in that direction you were, or might be, almost as infectious as if you were covered with spots. Not infectious in a material sense, but in an ethereal, psychic sense : long, that is, before ordinary people had begun to bother their heads about it.

That being so, they were naturally extremely

careful whom they asked to cross their threshold. Nice distinctions had to be drawn. The perfectly healthy individual with a wholesome fear of measles was debarred; while the spotted and measly one, with a firm belief in the Unreality of Matter, was received with open arms.

Holding these extraordinary and paradoxical views, it will surprise no one to hear that while they taught, and earnestly believed in, the beauty of love and charity, they were filled with chronic bitterness and discontent. Strange sudden friendships, alternating with violent antipathies, heart-burnings, jealousies, and suspicions: all these were unhappily as common to them as to us, with this difference, that, whereas we perhaps repent of our misdeeds and resolve to reform ourselves, all they did was to fervently deny the existence of Evil, and go on doing it.

There were naturally grades and degrees of proficiency in their ranks, due to the differences of temperament—or Mortal Mind. Some could talk glibly and incomprehensibly about sacred matters: these became readers or pastors. Some had a beguiling manner or a persuasive magnetism: and these healed the sick with great success. Some were madly fanatic, others culpably indifferent, and just a few were quite charming and ordinary.

All of them, however, with one consent, were perfectly sound on the question of money. They frankly recognized it as the mainspring of everything that was worth having upon earth, and worshipped it accordingly. Mrs. Eddy herself having given

them a good lead, it was part of their religion to extract every halfpenny out of believer and unbeliever alike, and they did so with a relentless persistence, which any London company promoter might have envied.

The highest honours that the Branch in Uppington could bestow were vested in the person of Mrs. Sutherland, a gifted and strenuous American, who, although she had adopted her English husband's country, could never be persuaded to relinquish her own, and spent most of her time in frequent journeys to and fro across the Atlantic.

A tall, commanding figure, crowned, although she was barely fifty, with beautiful white hair, her Paris clothes were the envy and admiration of Uppington; and, together with her genial smile and devastating nasal twang, caused her to be easily the most remarkable figure in the village. She lived with her devoted John in a handsome, well-built house near the river, which had become, in spite of his feeble and half-hearted protests, the headquarters of what was cryptically known as C.S.

After twenty years of married life, varied by a constant succession of surprises and innovations, John Sutherland had arrived at the conclusion that whatever Sara did was right, or, if not right, was inevitable and unavoidable, and could not therefore be laid to the account of a peace-loving husband. She had enough money of her own to gratify most of her whims, and some also of his; and he, being a lazy, good-tempered man with a



mania for golf, occupied himself exclusively with that and lived in contentment.

Mrs. Sutherland was a very busy woman. Her work in connection with the Church took up a good deal of her time, what with meetings, preparations for meetings, correspondence, etc. She was also known as a healer of great power, especially amongst the poorer brethren, who could generally manage to extract a few shillings for temporal necessities from her well-filled purse. Being most hospitably inclined, she was never happier than when entertaining her friends, who were welcome from all parts of England and America, so long as they held the right Belief. But what she particularly loved was a convert, a wobbler, somebody who could be coaxed, reasoned, or persuaded, into joining the Church. To these she sold every book that was issued by the C.S. Press, at fabulous prices; put down their names for various subscriptions and donations in spite of their protesting wriggles, and entered the whole of the transactions carefully in her account-book, with a calm and triumphant sense of duty performed.

It so happened that things were going a trifle slow this autumn in the local branch of the C.S. Church, and that Mrs. Sutherland, ever thirsting for new worlds to conquer, though prohibited by her far-sighted Leader from actual and aggressive proselytism, was casting her eye round surreptitiously for something to feed her inexorable appetite for excitement. Guided surely by the finger of Fate, it chanced to alight on Mrs. Christopher



Brown, whom she had known, but not intimately, for some years. Not that Amy was a very promising subject, she was too happy and contented to be that ; neither did she show any outward and visible signs of wasting disease, or of any other ailment, which would make her worth while as a convert. But there was something about her that touched Mrs. Sutherland's very human heart, a sort of engaging deference that seemed to indicate a charming tractability.

Mrs. Sutherland could imagine Amy sitting at the fount of wisdom, eagerly drinking in the inspired waters, once, that is, she could be induced to make a start. Difficult, of course, to administer a spiritual push to a lady one scarcely knew, but Mrs. Sutherland was optimistic, tactful, and an experienced fisher of men and women, so she baited her hook and waited patiently for a chance to cast it.

It came on the morning after Kit's murderous proclivities had driven his wife into the night nursery to sleep.

Amy had spent a restless night, due not to Dickie's alleged disorder, but to her own troubled mind. Hour after hour she lay beside her little sleeping son, and listened to his soft and regular breathing, pondering in her heart the meaning or cause of her husband's extraordinary behaviour. They had lived, so far, such simple united lives together that she believed she knew his every thought, as he had certainly known hers. The slightest trouble or difficulty on either side had been invariably confided to the other. He was as

equally interested in the shortcomings of the butcher as she was in the perversities of his chief at the office, or the breaking of his bootlace. Nothing had ever been too trivial to be mutually discussed, and she could not persuade herself that Kit's unhappiness was due to any outside cause, or he must have told her. But it was not any easier to determine what inward reason there could be for such a complete change in his manner, his habits, and—what was worse—in his affections.

The next morning he seemed much better, and no allusion was made on either side to the harrowing affairs of the preceding evening. He kissed them all round before departing for his train, and looked, Amy thought, brighter, and as though resolved to master himself, and throw off the depression which for the last few weeks had made his life and hers a burden.

After helping Nurse to make the beds, and interviewing Cook about the meals for the day, Amy dressed Dolly and Dick and prepared, rather listlessly, to take them for their morning walk. And, because she was feeling a little down-hearted, she chose the quiet road wherein stood proudly the Sutherland mansion in preference to the more populous High Street, where she would be certain to meet some of her friends.

As she passed the massive gates Mrs. Sutherland herself, still guided by the hand of Fate, emerged unwittingly from them, and seizing her opportunity stopped, smiling, with a friendly outstretched hand.

"Waal now," she cried, "if I wasn't just that vurry moment thinking about you!"

"Were you really?" replied Amy lamely, somewhat taken aback by this unexpected cordiality.

"And your darling babies," gushed Mrs. Sutherland, chucking Dolly playfully under the chin, without, however, disturbing by a fraction that small person's sweet gravity.

"And how's your husband?" she inquired, knowing that of course he could not be otherwise than well, but always ready to make a concession to popular ignorance, for the good of the Cause.

"He's not . . . very well," replied Amy, unconsciously taking her cue. "I'm a little bothered about him."

"But why?" demanded Mrs. Sutherland, regarding her with bright eyes of sympathy. "Don't you know that he *is* well, that he can't be anything else?"

Amy looked up surprised, then a faint flush rose to her face as she recalled vague rumours of this strange religion.

"Of course," she said hurriedly, "I'd forgotten, you don't believe in illness, do you?"

"You can't believe in something you know doesn't exist, can you?" asked the other, smiling.

"No, of course not," replied Amy politely, "still I don't understand quite . . . how . . ."

"See here," began Mrs. Sutherland, now thoroughly into her stride. "Gard is All; you believe that, do you not?"

"Y—Yes of course."

"Gard is *all* Love, Gard is *all* Good, do you see that?"

"Quite," said Amy intelligently.

"If Gard is Good and Gard is All," proceeded Mrs. Sutherland glibly, "where is the Evil, where is the Ill? Why, nowhere!" and she concluded triumphantly, "There can't be *more* than *All*, can there?"

This devastating logic conveyed rather less than nothing at all to Amy, who was unused to mental gymnastics. She therefore merely conjured up a polite little smile and said:

"Oh, I see."

"No, my dear," chuckled Mrs. Sutherland, "you don't see at all. I don't know whether," she inquired almost anxiously, "you would care to have me tell you any more?"

"Thank you," said Amy doubtfully, "it's very kind of you."

"Perhaps you could drop in this afternoon," persisted Mrs. Sutherland, determined not to let the grass grow under her feet. "I have a few people coming in to tea. Do come; say yes, right now," she urged with a disarming smile.

And of course Amy said obediently, "Yes, thank you, I should like to very much."

So the First Reader shook hands warmly and went her way, well satisfied with her morning's work.

Amy too, as she walked along, was a trifle uplifted. She could not help feeling that it was something of an honour to be invited, nay, to be

begged, to go to tea with the rich and important Mrs. Sutherland: not to an At Home, to which anybody might be bidden, but to an informal and intimate tea-party. Although practically without any social aspirations, she had a very proper and profound respect for those whose position was better than her own, and Mrs. Sutherland, with her Paris clothes, her large and imposing house, and her frequent journeys to America, had always been regarded from afar with ungrudging admiration.

That she was a Christian Scientist had hardly counted for anything at all, either for or against her, for Amy had no convictions whatever about religion. In her mind it was another name for Church, where one went on Sunday as a matter of course in one's best hat, and returned with a familiar feeling of elation—whether due to devotional exercises or to the inspiring effect of the best hat, she did not trouble to inquire. She took religion on Sunday as she took the wash on Monday, and Nurse's night out on Tuesday, as part of the general and quite satisfactory scheme of things. Christian Science she regarded, from the little she knew about it, as a slight deviation from the highest standard of conduct, not exactly unladylike, but detracting a fraction from one's reputation—a sort of moral squint.

Into the prospect of her visit that afternoon, it hardly entered at all. She wanted to see what the drawing-room was like and what sort of a gown Mrs. Sutherland wore in the house for tea. And perhaps, unconsciously—for she was much too nice to realize



it—she liked the idea of entering those exclusive portals, which were never opened to her friends.

Four o'clock found Amy, in her new autumn coat and skirt, and spotless white kid gloves, following a neat parlourmaid across the spacious tiled hall of Mrs. Sutherland's house.

There was a clamour of tongues as the drawing-room door opened, which, however, ceased with startling abruptness as she entered the room. All eyes were turned upon her as she shook hands in her pretty self-possessed way with her hostess, and not until she had discovered a chair, and was discussing the question of sugar and cream with that lady, did a murmur of conversation arise again.

A dark, eager, little woman then took up the thread of her story, which had evidently been interrupted by the entrance of Amy.

"Of course," she said in a jerky, excitable voice, "I had not spoken to Nellie for more than *two* years, after the spiteful way she behaved; and when I walked into the room, and saw her seated there, it was very awkward—everybody looked so uncomfortable. But I thought, *now* you shall all see what C.S. can do, knowing how frightfully they all are against it. I just," she continued, raising her head proudly, "went up to her, and," this with dramatic emphasis, "*I kissed her!*"

If she had said "*I bit her,*" the effect on her hearers, and possibly on Nellie also, would have been much the same. No one seemed at all convinced



by such a marvellous exhibition of magnanimity ; indeed, if the horrid truth may be whispered, Mrs. Van Laun was considered not altogether " sound." Besides which, each lady there was waiting with a great display of Christian resignation for the moment when the others should have finished their boring stories, and she herself might relate her own much more thrilling and remarkable experiences.

Amy meantime was taking a rapid survey of her surroundings. The massive and unusual furniture, the gleaming Persian rugs on the polished floor, the luxuriant blue silk curtains, all claimed her fervent admiration. Mrs. Sutherland too, her beautiful hair piled high, her regal figure loosely robed in some Eastern dream of green and purple—materialized, however, undoubtedly in Paris—was a picture not to be forgotten, and Christian Science came in a very poor third in her estimation.

Suddenly her attention was arrested by a skinny, anæmic woman, with scanty red hair, and an expression of milky meekness, that would have well become a newborn lamb.

" I hear," she was saying, " that Mrs. Smith's teeth are all right again."

Now this, although Amy in her abysmal ignorance did not know it, was great and exceeding glad news. Every one pricked up her ears, maintaining at the same time a look of sublime unconsciousness to indicate that nothing about Mrs. Smith's teeth could surprise them in the least. For Scientists, it must be admitted, are a bit shy of toothache. It is not an easy thing to tackle, like consumption or paralysis,

where the patient will lie peacefully by the hour while you cure him, grateful and optimistic to the last moment, when the perverse obstinacy of other people's thought carries him off. An aching tooth is a more urgent, insistent matter—not to be trifled with, raging and impatient, refusing to listen to words of wisdom. Arguments and sophistries avail nothing to restrain the horrid activity of a wildly plunging nerve; and even advanced Scientists will admit that it is a "difficult thing to manage," and generally give it "best," particularly if the tooth is their own.

Amy, missing the real importance of the occasion, yet felt that something was required of her :

"Did she," she inquired politely, "have toothache?"

Mrs. Agar, the aforesaid skinny one, turned on her a limpid and watery eye.

"Her teeth were very much decayed," she bleated. "She is a charwoman, and people, of course, don't like that sort of thing; besides, she thought she seemed to feel"—this with a kind of suggestive humility—"pain."

Amy's eyes were fixed on Mrs. Agar's face and the eyes of every one else were fixed on Amy.

"And what did you do?" she inquired with interest.

"Oh I—" said Mrs. Agar deprecatingly, "I did nothing. Mrs. Grobin was able to help her," Mrs. Grobin being indicated by a wave of the bony, kid-covered hand,

That lady, a gaunt and ungracious-looking female, wearing preposterous headgear put on crooked, returned Amy's politely inquiring glance with a sort of expectant stolidity.

"I was able," she said in a rasping voice, "to show the woman the Truth. Once the Error in Mortal Mind was exposed, she knew that her teeth were sound."

"But were they?" incautiously demanded Amy.

Mrs. Grobin fixed her with a stern and glassy eye.

"Perfectly," she answered incisively.

Amy pondered this amazing assertion, incredulous yet impressed.

"How long," she asked, seeking further enlightenment, "have you done this sort of thing?"

"It's seventeen years since I first saw the Truth," replied Mrs. Grobin acidly, "I am, I think, the oldest Christian Scientist here," she added, looking round with pardonable pride for the admiration that she felt was only her due. But everybody was wearing an expression of phlegmatic indifference, so she closed her eyes with the patient endurance of a holy martyr and relapsed into silence.

"Mrs. Grobin," good-naturedly explained her hostess, turning to Amy, "is one of our most advanced Healers. Vurry successful she's been, in spite of," she hesitated, "family opposition."

Mrs. Grobin opened her eyes again:

"My husband is *not* a Scientist," she snapped.

"But surely," protested Amy, "if you are able to show him such wonderful cures, he must be

convinced. I mean, even if he doesn't understand how you do them?"

"There are some people you can't convince," said Mrs. Grobin resentfully, "they make up their minds about a thing, and all you can do or say won't alter them."

"But what is it that he objects to," asked Amy, "if he can see for himself what you do?" She was rather annoyed with Mr. Grobin.

"He has no objection whatever," explained Mrs. Grobin, "he knows nothing at all about it and doesn't want to. He just laughs," she added gloomily, "every time the subject is mentioned."

Amy most injudiciously laughed too. Somehow she liked Mr. Grobin better for his light-hearted and yet blasphemous behaviour.

There was a distinct pause, chilly with disapproval.

"How does Smith, the husband, take it?" asked Mrs. Sutherland, coming again to the rescue.

"Ah," said Mrs. Grobin bitterly, "of course he's against it."

"It's always the husbands," moaned Mrs. Agar feebly.

"But if her decayed teeth are made whole," said Amy stoutly, sure, this time, of her ground, "whatever has he to object to? He ought to be very pleased."

"Mortal Mind," explained Mrs. Grobin tersely.

"And," illuminated the unsound Mrs. Van Laun. "of course the parish were going to give her the

money for a new set—that's what *really* annoyed him."

Every one looked slightly hurt at this lack of proper feeling on the part of Mrs. Van Laun; the explanation given by the unappreciated but orthodox Mrs. Grobin was felt to be a more suitable one.

Taking advantage of the pause, Amy rose to go, thanking her hostess politely for an interesting afternoon with that half shy and wholly charming smile which made her so popular wherever she went.

As the door closed behind her, Mrs. Grobin's aggrieved voice was heard lamenting.

"I hardly had an opportunity to say a word to her," she complained.

But Mrs. Sutherland in her superior wisdom smiled with confidence:

"She will come again," she said comfortably,

"I guess Mrs. Brown's not quite ready yet for C.S."



## CHAPTER VI

NOW it must be clearly stated that Lebah was not by any means a bad girl, in spite of her experiences ; even if, because of them, she was unfortunately not a very good one.

Left an orphan at the romantic age of seventeen, by the death of her mother, she found herself possessed of five hundred pounds insurance money, and an annuity, proceeding from an inscrutable and very uncommunicative firm of solicitors, of one hundred a year. No interfering relations darkened her horizon, and so, packing her small belongings, she quitted the lodgings that were the only home she had ever known, and despite the warnings and mutterings of a few old fogies, who didn't matter at all, flew straight to the Paris of her dreams, there to cultivate her heaven-sent voice, and prepare for a glorious *début* at Covent Garden. Once in that entirely congenial atmosphere, and with only the scantiest of introductions, she soon found herself enrolled in a company of free and joyous spirits, all of them searching with indifferent success, but with unvarying optimism, for the road to Fame. For the first two years she worked hard at her singing, and studied at a dramatic school, where she



was voted one of the cleverest and most popular girls of her set. In spite of her freedom and success, a certain fastidiousness, fortunately, for a long time protected her from untoward experiences, a delicacy of feeling, which demanded that vice, accepted as a matter of course, should go decently clad before her—should approach her in beautiful colours and harmonious sounds, rather than in the grosser forms of amorous students.

At last, however, a young French sculptor fell in love with her, and she with love; and the inevitable crisis occurred, leaving her a wiser but happily not a sadder girl. It was a brief and painful experience, and taught her a lesson which she found most useful in the succeeding years. Numerous aspirants followed the illuminating Frenchman, and to each she gave just enough of herself to infatuate them—and no more—till they bored her, which they did with surprising speed and regularity. She discovered that she meant a great deal more to men than they meant to her, and this knowledge equipped her with an amused indifference to the other sex, which became one of her greatest assets for its discomfiture.

If she had used her powers in the right direction, as for instance for the undoing of certain managers and agents connected with her profession, we should not probably have discovered her in that purple satin kimono, mistress of a tiny and insignificant flat in Shaftesbury Avenue. Nor would she have spent that fateful Sunday at Brighton, for she would have been far beyond the reach of the

suburban Christopher Brown. But Lebah was never, in spite of many persevering efforts, able to get on at all well with those mighty ones who could have raised her to such giddy heights. Something within her, she knew not what it was, but possibly the uncommunicative solicitor could have enlightened her, seemed to resent their advances. She found herself suddenly cold and aloof, when by all the rules of the game she should have been engaging and intimate. Consequently she offended one after another of the men whom she longed to propitiate, and at the age of twenty-four had come to the conclusion that she was not of the stuff of which successful opera singers are made, and had relapsed with cheerful philosophy into an inconspicuous place in the chorus of musical comedy.

She harboured absolutely no feelings of resentment or bitterness against her fate ; experience had taught her not to expect too much, and she accepted Life as she found it, but without enthusiasm. The men amongst whom her lot was cast were, in her opinion, a particularly unsatisfying crowd. They lacked the essential quality of virility, which was practically the only thing she really valued in a man. Women, she realized, had, or might have, brains, capacity, will-power, anything and everything except this one compelling element of primeval force : the something that gave any man who possessed it an instant and insistent claim ; which laughed to scorn a woman's brains, paralyzed her will-power, and struck right through the veneer of her acquired civilization to the keynote of her

being—her foolish little heart. In this divine fire, or brute force—whichever you like—she had found men strangely deficient till that day, when on the Parade at Brighton she looked into the tawny eyes of Jack Vibart. There at a glance she saw something which stirred into activity some hidden sleeping force of her being; and her soul rose up within her and clamoured for its mate.

Now Lebah was not the girl to deny her soul anything for which it clamoured. Her opinion was that Life is short, and that you are a long time dead. But behind her Sphinx-like eyes and inscrutable demeanour there was a very alert and active brain. One might, as she knew very well, come a fearful cropper if the soul were allowed the handling of the reins, and she had no intention of riding for a fall. In the days that followed her meeting with Jack she had thought of little else. His dark, saturnine face was constantly before her, his rasping voice rang in her ears, and she was conscious of an uneasy, expectant feeling that at any moment she might hear his knock at her door, for that he would call and see her she had no doubt whatever.

She had not long to wait. Captain Vibart found Brighton rather dull, with his favourite aunt under the turf, and early in the week betook himself back to town and put up at a good hotel, prepared, as he said, to do himself fat after the lean years spent in the wilds of Nigeria.

He was a man of few friends, and those of a strange and varied character. Dog-fanciers, prize-fighters,

an occasional shaggy and unkempt Colonial, "home" on a visit, or some utterly incoherent foreigner with a mission in England: these were his particular choice—anybody, that is, who was unusual and odd. Although himself a public school man, with the usual lofty disdain of anyone who was not, he took a perverse pleasure in the society of those whom he considered outsiders: raw material being more to his taste than the finished product of civilization. Of women, in spite of a varied and exciting experience in all parts of the world, he knew practically nothing. They were divided, in his mind, into two distinct classes: the good and the bad. The first, a small and boring minority, consisting of those who either by temperament or by environment had no opportunity of being otherwise; marriageable girls of whom he fought furiously shy; and the aunt who died. The latter class, with an overwhelming majority, was composed of entertaining and expensive people in whose company you could comfortably relax, keeping, however, your eye skinned the while.

That Lebah seemed to fit into neither of these categories made her unusually interesting, and gave her a precarious value of her own. Impossible that she should belong, from what he knew of her history, to the minority; yet some instinct protested against her being relegated definitely to the majority. If she were, he reflected, at the psychological stage when the first merges into the last, that very attractive stage, it was indeed a piece of good luck having met her again. And on the strength

of these conclusions he decided to call on her at the first opportunity.

It took him a very short time to make himself entirely at home in the tiny flat. There was an air of complete freedom about it, which suited him exactly. No tiresome restrictions as to when he might call or how long he was expected to stay. Lebah took him for granted as an old friend, and he was admitted at any hour of the day he chose to knock three times at her front door, and encouraged to make himself at home, which he did in the frankest way possible. The household staff consisted of one disreputable old charwoman, known as Mrs. Doody, who came in at appointed hours to "tidy up." Early in the morning, while Lebah still slept, she tidied up the sitting-room, returning in the afternoon to tidy up the bedroom, make the bed, and cook the dinner, which last she did with such conspicuous success that her many shortcomings were overlooked. There was therefore no reason why Jack should not drift in at any hour he pleased, and he soon acquired the habit of doing so every day: sometimes in the morning to take Lebah out to lunch, and sometimes in the afternoon for a cup of tea, which they made together in the tiny kitchen.

After the theatre they often met again, either to sup with a merry party of Lebah's friends, by whom Jack as a host was appreciated at his full value, or in the little sitting-room of her flat for an hour's cosy *tête-à-tête*.



By the end of the week their intimacy had acquired all the licence of an old-established friendship, both in their own eyes and in those of Lebah's set. And if, which is not likely in such uncritical circles, any censorious eyebrow had raised itself, it would have been quite wrong. For Lebah was managing with such consummate skill that, although they both hovered near the precipice over which, sooner or later, they would have to peep—if they did no more—they were still on a perfectly platonic footing : she was determined, it would seem, to show him how very good and proper she could be, in spite of her Bohemian environment.

And Jack took it all in, or most of it, asking no inconvenient questions, and believing all he was told. But he did rather particularly want to know who else besides himself was in the field ; for he hardly imagined that a girl of Lebah's manifest attractions always lived this life of chaste seclusion, yet there was never a sign of a rival—nor a hint.

At last, one afternoon, as they sat at tea, very content with each other, on either side of the fire, he approached the subject from afar off, watching her as he spoke with his curiously indifferent air.

"Where's the cove who was supposed to go to Brighton that day—the one who didn't turn up ? "

Lebah had been expecting something of this sort, and was not unprepared.

"Heaven knows," she answered laconically.

"Don't you ? " he asked.

"I haven't seen him since," she said.



"Then he did turn up after all?"

"Oh yes," said Lebah, who was taking no risks, "we travelled back to town together."

Here she stopped, and Jack, seeing the subject about to drop into oblivion, bestirred himself to galvanize it into life again.

"What sort of a cove is 'e—who is 'e at all?"

"He's the sort of person," said Lebah, "that bores me stiff, and I told him so on the way up."

"How'd he take it?" inquired Jack with interest.

"Lying down, of course; he's made that way."

Jack reflected.

"It must have been a facer," he said slowly.

"I wonder you didn't discover what a bore he was before you let him go down to Brighton."

Lebah perceived that the time had come for explanations.

"The fact is," she said glibly, "he's a married man who has been crazy about me for the last few weeks. Nothing I could say or do would induce him to leave me alone; you know the sort—followed me wherever I went. I couldn't get rid of him. I happened to say that I was going down to Brighton to see the girl I told you about, and of course he wanted to go too, so I stupidly said he might. But at last I got so utterly fed up with him that I told him I should never speak to him again, and I won't either. He's been here several times this week, but I know his knock and I never answer the door. In time, I suppose, he'll tumble to it that I mean what I say."

Lebah heaved a sigh of relief at having unburdened herself of this unkind prevarication, thankful it was over, for she was not by nature a liar, and only when driven thereto by necessity, as on the present occasion, used lying as a means to an end.

Jack just glanced at her, only half convinced.

"You've got a heart of stone, Lebah," he said, with a grin. "Do you treat 'em all like that?"

Lebah looked away with an enigmatic smile.

"More or less," she said, "up to the present."

"Then I may take it," suggested Jack, "that I haven't yet begun to bore you?"

To this she made no reply.

"At any rate," he went on, "you know my knock by now: three raps; and if you don't open the door I shall take the hint the first time, I promise you."

"You'll think I'm out, like he does," said Lebah provocatively.

"Oh no, I shan't, I'm much too intuitive for that; and besides I shall sit on the mat till you turn up, just to make sure."

"I can't conceive you going on as he did," said Lebah, "even if . . . if you fell in love with me."

Jack looked at her entirely unmoved.

"Would that bore you?" he asked gravely.

"I don't know," laughed Lebah, "you'd better try, and see."

"I'm afraid to risk it," said Jack; "you've spoilt my nerve. I say," he went on without a stop, "you remember the aunt who died before I could

give her that dressing-gown? She's left me some money."

"Kind soul," said Lebah, readjusting herself at a moment's notice.

"I make it a rule never to go near my solicitor. What I say is, if you're not there he can't worry you, so I give him a miss in baulk. But some one told him I was home, and this morning I got a letter addressed to my bank, saying that the dear old thing had left me something to go on with. I think I shall buy a motor."

"What extravagance!" said Lebah conversationally.

"It's not really," said Jack earnestly. "I look upon it more in the light of an investment; it would do to take the dressing-gown to the other aunt. You can't put it in a parcel; it's too bulgy. She's got a lot of money and no one to leave it to. Do you see the point?"

"Quite," said Lebah. "It's a very sound scheme."

"I've found the address. She lives at Uppington; not far from town; just a nice little run."

"Is this the religious maniac?" inquired Lebah.

"That's it," said Jack; "she goes in for Christian Science—ever heard of it?"

"N . . . yes," said Lebah doubtfully, "they don't believe in doctors."

"If that's all," said Jack, "she's not so bad as I thought. I think myself they do more harm than good, as a rule; that's my idea. I haven't seen her for years," he went on, "she's always in

America. She goes there once a year to have a scrap with her relations—they all hate Christian Science like poison. That's why she won't leave 'em any money. She married my Uncle John and they've no children. I shall certainly buy the car, and take the thing down; it might touch her heart, what do you think ? ”

And Lebah, all unwitting of the forces gathering at Uppington, said indifferently :

“ Why not ? ”

After he had left her, she wondered idly to herself the reason of the sudden change in their conversation, and whether or not it was intentional. For Jack had a jerky, disconnected way of speaking, and darted from one subject to another with sometimes disconcerting rapidity : he seemed to think in flashes. Lebah often speculated about his feeling towards her. Obviously he was rather attracted, and undoubtedly, if he were the man she took him to be, their relationship would have been a great deal more intimate by this time if she had allowed it. Did he, she wondered, appreciate her reticence, or was her apparent coldness nipping in the bud a possible affection ? His brown, impenetrable face never indicated to her his thoughts ; he seemed to wear always the same expression, and it was only by the movements of his nervous, sinewy hands that she could ever judge his frame of mind. She did not even know if his bored indifference were genuine, or whether he assumed it to hide the cast-iron brake with which he controlled himself. He

was altogether a fascinating enigma. There was one point, however, on which she was perfectly clear. She knew by instinct that behind that calm, imperturbable mask there lay in wait a fierce wild beast, held in check by a masterful will, but ready at any moment to leap out and devour that which should appease its voracious appetite; and of this she was afraid. She, who had looked unmoved on a hundred raging monsters, shrank with fear at the thought of this one. She hardly yet realized her feeling about it. The nervousness, which she often experienced in Jack's presence, she attributed to her over-anxiety to make a good impression; for Lebah, it must be admitted, had a great matrimonial scheme in hand, and Jack was cast for the strongest part in it.

He was exactly the kind of man she had always hoped to meet. A man of the world, a traveller, possessed of a good social position and a large income. And when in addition to all these attractions her heart leapt spontaneously at the sight of him, she could no longer doubt that here at last was the hero of her dreams. Whether she was the lady of his, was a rather anxious question, which often exercised her mind. She knew that with her knowledge of men she could have had him at her feet in less than a week, but, as she rightly argued, he was no unfledged stripling to be rushed into a hasty union on the crest of his passions. If she were ever to land so big a fish, she would need all her skill to play him, all her powers to haul him in. And so, while with her brains she was scheming



how best to entrap him, the more emotional part of her nature was delighting in him day by day—in his presence, his touch, and in the sardonic, world-worn look of him. And deep down in her heart, hidden almost from her own inner consciousness, was a delicious little tremor of fear, more exciting than all the other emotions put together.

Jack, too, had he been inclined for it, had plenty of food for reflection. But he was not, having set his face resolutely against any kind of brain-work since about the age of twelve. He believed, and rightly, that nearly all bother was manufactured by clever people who couldn't leave things alone; and that a habit of thinking was responsible for a great deal of misery in this world. He had therefore sedulously avoided the practice, relegating it, as he often said, to coves who had their living to earn. When, however, a girl behaved in such a bewildering way as did Lebah, a fellow could not help wondering what she was up to, even if it endangered his peace of mind. She had started off in great form. No uncertainty about that first day at Brighton. She had the pace too, anyone could see that; and, if her promising eyes meant what they said, she could see the post as well as anybody. And yet, half-way round the course, or what a fellow believed to be the course, she seemed unaccountably to jib. All the usual devices were of no avail; it was impossible to get any further with her. There was a certain obtuseness, or perhaps elusiveness, about Lebah that was very



difficult to locate. She was always fascinating, even alluring; always ready to amuse and be amused; wildly gay and hauntingly sad by turns; but never was she affectionate or in the smallest degree coy, and Jack wondered to himself what exactly her little game was, and how long it was going to last.

Being a man of few words and a very limited number of ideas, he was therefore a simple and straightforward character, in that he said what he thought, and did what he pleased without reference to the opinions or the convenience of anyone else whatever. His code of morals was equally lucid and direct, though not fit perhaps to be further enlarged upon in these pages.

He never pretended to understand women, but as far as his observations and experiences went he found that presents and perseverance generally pulled it off; or, if not, there was probably some other fellow ahead of you. Having more or less satisfied himself that there was no one else in the field, he had therefore no doubt of his ultimate success, and the fact that you could not, as he said, take it off the shelf, added zest to the proceedings, and raised Lebah in his estimation, even if at the same time it exasperated him a little.

It will be seen then that, could Lebah have read his thoughts as he wended his way home after his conversation with her, she would have found scant encouragement for her matrimonial schemes. On the other hand, she would have seen no antagonism to contend with, for the idea of marriage had never in the wildest flights of his imagination entered his

mind. They were in fact both working towards different ends, and the end of each was violently opposed to the wishes of the other—so that, whether they were to marry or not, the conditions were ripe for the experiment.

## CHAPTER VII

**K**IT was very unhappy indeed. Very gloomy and depressed he was, and filled with dismal speculations as to the reason of Lebah's extraordinary behaviour. For never since parting with her that night on her doorstep had he been able to get a word with her, nor even so much as a glimpse, excepting across the footlights—a fleeting vision that only served to accentuate his misery. Day after day he ascended the flights of dreary stone steps that led to her eyrie amongst the chimney pots, only to find a coldly unresponsive front door. He had waited patiently with intermittent knockings, till fear became a horrid certainty and he was obliged sadly to retrace his footsteps downstairs again. Even when the door was opened, it only disclosed the dirty face of the faithful Doody, who greeted him with a knowing and sympathetic grin, and discursive explanations and apologies, but never with any useful information. Letters and notes received no reply, and even pre-paid telegrams and waiting messenger boys were ignored, or evaded with cruel agility. If he called at the theatre, she had just gone over to Appenrodt's, and when he rushed across to the restaurant, she

was nowhere to be seen. By the time he had got back to the stage door, she had "gone up" and could see nobody; and on the one occasion when he waited until the play was over she was so long in coming down that he was obliged to dash off to catch the last train home, before she appeared.

Lebah, it seemed, was firmly determined not to see him. She was acting with a deliberate cruelty of which he could hardly, even now, believe her capable. And yet the more he reflected on the events of the previous few weeks, on his own fatuous and compromising behaviour, the less he was surprised at her decision. So well conducted a girl, so experienced withal, could not be expected to allow her name to be lightly coupled, as undoubtedly it would be, with that of a married man. It only proved to Kit, how right he had been in his estimate of her: how very different and immensely superior she was to other actresses, yet endowed with all their charm—and more. But while he approved of her propriety, he could not help feeling that her methods were unnecessarily drastic. She could not realize, he felt sure, anything of the acute misery she was causing him, or she would never inflict such suffering. Hence the long explanatory letters, the frantic notes and telegrams to which no reply was ever vouchsafed.

He began to wonder uneasily if she were coquetting with him, and almost decided—but not quite—to leave her alone for a little while, in the hope that

feminine pique would serve him where his own persistence failed. And, amongst all these conflicting doubts and fears, a bitter feeling of suspicion and jealousy grew up in his mind, and flourished like some poisonous weed. Try as he might, he could not shut his eyes to the fact that Lebah and he had been the best of friends until the advent of the insidious stranger, that it was immediately after her meeting with him that her feelings changed; and he felt almost positive that, in some way he could not at present understand, Vibart was at the bottom of her refusal to see him.

He tried to realize what the consequences to himself would be if she adhered to her ruthless determination, if she utterly and entirely cast him off. And instead of welcoming such a *dénouement* as the direct interposition of a beneficent Providence enabling him to return peacefully to the bosom of his family, such was the perverse nature of the man that he was filled only with the gloomiest forebodings at the prospect. His life without Lebah, he reflected, would be so utterly unbearable, that he would be certainly driven sooner or later to put a desperate end to it: a very effective and quite painless end that would cause her years of haunting remorse. And so he spent anxious days and sleepless nights alternately yearning for his divinity and—what was equally wearing to the system—heaping curses on the oblivious head of Jack Vibart, whom he rightly judged to be keeping him out of his own.

A fortnight of these harrowing experiences did little to improve the state of Kit's health, for, if "a contented mind is a continual feast," a discontented one is chronic starvation. He began to look thin and worried; his digestion, never very strong, went on strike in a most determined way; his head ached, his hand shook, and his temper would have disgraced a militant suffragette.

No wonder Amy watched him day by day with increasing concern. All her tact and sympathy were of no avail to dispel the dark depression that hung over him like a lowering thunder-cloud. She went into the kitchen, and with her own hands prepared his favourite dishes, but no dainties could tempt that fickle appetite. He refused violently to see a doctor, or even to consider a tonic from the chemist. Every suggestion she made for his relief, and they were many and ingenious, was treated with contumely. Every word of wifely counsel and consolation seemed to irritate him beyond endurance; and Amy, casting about for any means to help him, began to realize with a sadly sinking heart that she could do nothing.

Once she had arrived at this despondent conclusion, the outlook became much clearer: there was nothing for it but to send for the doctor. Dr. Bennett had helped her through the terrors of childbirth, and was always, as she said, so sweet and sympathetic that he had completely won her confidence, and she felt that to him alone could she unburden her heart. For, trying as things appeared on the surface, there was a still more serious aspect



of her husband's condition which she felt it would be wrong of her to disregard. A secret fear was growing up in her mind, a suspicion so terrible, that she could no longer keep it to herself.

Scarcely, then, had the door closed behind Kit one morning, than she rang up Dr. Bennett on the telephone and requested him to call at his earliest convenience. He would, it appeared, be passing her house about eleven if that would suit her; and Amy said that would do nicely, and hastily rang off before he could ask any tiresome questions.

Nurse, although it was the day for turning out the spare room, was directed to take the children for their morning walk, and their mother, with some trepidation in her heart, and a basket of mending by her side, waited in the comfortably furnished dining-room for the visit of the doctor. To consult with him about her husband, without Kit's knowledge or consent, seemed to her a very underhand and deceitful proceeding and one which required quite a lot of courage on her part; but her sense of wifely responsibility was roused and she was determined to leave no stone unturned to restore him if possible to health again, whatever the cost to herself might be.

At the familiar hoot of the motor, Amy jumped up nervously and patted her hair before the glass in the overmantel, and by the time the door opened had subsided again into her arm-chair with a slightly heightened colour.

"Good morning," said the doctor cheerily,

pressing her hand with paternal, or perhaps avuncular warmth. "I needn't inquire if you are my patient, you look as fresh as a daisy this morning," he added, lowering himself into a chair on the other side of the hearth.

His genial tone, and the merry blue eyes twinkling in his round weather-tanned face, gave Amy fresh inspiration, and she looked up at him with a friendly smile.

"It's about . . ." she began nervously, "about . . . Kit. I think he's run down . . . he . . . I'm afraid he's been overworking."

"Yes?" said the doctor encouragingly, knowing that whatever Kit's ailment might be it was not due to overwork, but realizing, none better, that to hurry and hustle a lady patient, during a recital of symptoms, is often to lose the key of the situation. Let them talk, he used to say, and, out of the profusion of irrelevant detail, the intelligent man can construct his case. Nevertheless there were occasions when a little encouragement was judicious: and here, apparently, was one of them, for Mrs. Brown appeared unable to get any further with her story.

"A little irritable?" he suggested with a twinkle.

"More than that," replied Amy quickly, "he is always moody and miserable."

"No appetite?" ventured the doctor.

"I don't think it's his stomach," said Amy with wifely candour.

The doctor waited, watching her with a kindly smile. He had almost diagnosed the case as one of

slight conjugal fracture, when something in Amy's eyes struck him as unusual and his smile gave place to an expression of grave interest.

"I must tell you," began Mrs. Brown with an effort, "that ever since we have been back from the seaside I have noticed a difference in Kit. He has grown thinner; he is unhappy and restless; he can't sit still, and everything seems to bother him. Whatever I say or do annoys him, and he simply can't bear the sight of the children. In fact, he seems to have changed into an entirely different man."

She paused, and her eyes clouded a moment with unshed tears.

"Is he sleeping well?" asked the doctor.

"No, very badly," replied Amy, recovering herself. "He never goes to bed till twelve or one o'clock, and if I suggest sitting up with him he gets quite angry. For some weeks he has been like this, ever since we returned; but about ten days ago, he seemed to suddenly get worse. It began on a Sunday. In the morning, when he woke up, he took it into his head to go down to Brighton for the day. I wanted to go with him, but no, he must go alone. So unnatural, wasn't it? Well, off he went, and spent the whole day mooning about by himself; a thing he hates, or used to. When he came back I was in bed, and as he didn't come upstairs I went down to see what was the matter."

Amy paused, uncertain how to go on, then she sighed deeply.

"Well," she continued, "I didn't find out. He was desperately unhappy, with a sort of savage, wicked look I had never seen on his face before. I asked him very kindly to tell me what was troubling him, tried to be as nice and sympathetic as I could. But it was no use; he got awfully wild and incoherent, and said he felt like murdering people just for the love of strangling them!"

"Was he sober?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, *quite*," said Amy, "*perfectly*. He really meant it too, you could see the hate shining in his eyes. I was terribly frightened; I didn't know what to do, whether to call out for Nurse, or to dash out of the room. However, I tried to laugh it off and pretend it was a joke, and at last he turned to me in a horrible, unnatural way and told me to go back to bed and he would follow me presently. So I took the opportunity to slip into the nursery, and got into bed beside Dickie. I locked the door too!"

"Hum . . . m," said the doctor guardedly. "I think I'd better look in and have a chat with him one evening. Do you know of anyone he's been having a row with?"

"No," said Amy shortly. A minute later she looked up and caught the doctor's observant eye upon her.

"But I can tell you," she added hastily, "who it is he wanted to murder. It's *me*. I saw it in his eyes. He hates me!"

"Oh, nonsense," protested the doctor emphatically. "Come, Mrs. Brown, you mustn't get silly

ideas like that into your head. I don't know a man more devoted to his wife than your husband is to you."

"I know I'm right," she persisted. "Whenever he looks at me now, I can see the same thing—a sort of dislike, he can't bear the sight of me." Her voice shook. "But they always do, don't they, turn against their wives?" she choked, groping for her handkerchief.

"Who does?" demanded the doctor in bewilderment.

"When they . . . Oh, doctor," she sobbed, "don't think me silly, I'm not really . . . his mother died in a lunatic asylum, and I believe Kit is going the same way. I've tried and tried not to see it . . . but I can't hide it any longer . . . he gets worse every day. Can't you do something for him? I'm so unhappy."

Dr. Bennett got up out of his chair and patted her gently on the shoulder.

"Poor little woman," he said kindly, "that's a very big trouble for you, isn't it? Don't worry more than you can help," he continued. "People often get over these things when they're taken in time, and I don't think, from what you tell me, that there's much wrong with him so far."

"No, I daresay not, but it's the future I'm thinking of," said Amy despondently. "It would be such a terrible thing if he went mad, I'm more frightened of madness than anything."

"As a matter of fact," said the doctor, "in nine cases out of ten, it's not these people with hereditary

tendencies who go mad at all : it's those who have to live with them. So try and look on the bright side of things, won't you ? ”

And Amy smiled gratefully up into his twinkling eyes.

“ What a dear kind old thing you are,” she said, “ such a comfort. I don't know whatever I'd do without you.”



## CHAPTER VIII

AMY'S conversation with the doctor marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Brown *ménage*. Hitherto she had been content to follow blindly in her husband's wake, guided by his wishes, and sheltered, as she liked to think, by the protection of his love. Now, however, she was face to face with the terrible realization that she could no longer follow in the wake of a person whose sense of direction was uncertain : she could not be guided by wishes whose tendency was towards murder, neither could she rely on a love that was rapidly being turned into hate by the ravages of an insidious disease. For there was now no doubt in her mind that her husband was the victim of hereditary insanity ; and the fact that Dr. Bennett refused to diagnose it definitely as such only strengthened her opinion of that dear man's tact and consideration.

An apparently chance interview was arranged one evening between the doctor and his unsuspecting patient, without, however, any satisfactory results. The doctor, cautious and observant, found it difficult to come to any conclusion without a proper examination ; and Kit was irritated by what he considered unwarrantable interference, and frankly

contemptuous of even a suggestion of nervous breakdown.

"I'm not an hysterical woman," he argued impatiently. "You look after the Missus and the babies, doctor, and leave me alone, like a good chap."

And for the time being nothing further could be done. The doctor, sitting on the fence in the most approved medical fashion, assured Amy privately that, while there was for the present no immediate prospect of any serious development, there were certain symptoms that should not be overlooked. He warned her against the dangers of sudden excitement, of over-fatigue; laid great stress on the importance of suitable diet, and the proper performance of the internal functions. He advised her not to leave her husband much alone, to be bright and cheerful with him, and to prevent, as far as possible, his mind from dwelling upon himself and his infirmities, whatever they might be.

Amy listened very earnestly to his words of wisdom, and promised faithfully to follow his advice. She watched Kit incessantly, and not a day passed that she did not discover fresh evidence in confirmation of her fears. Her anxious eyes missed no look or movement, and the fact that her husband was obviously restless under her close scrutiny, and unable to meet her steady gaze, only added to her conviction that his mind was affected. She carried out the doctor's orders with untiring good temper, and a persistent zeal that nearly drove the unhappy patient to distraction, even going so far as to sug-

gest that perhaps he would sleep better in a room by himself, a proposition which much to her surprise was accepted with alacrity. Another sign, she told herself, of mental aberration. For, if there was one subject upon which Kit felt deeply, it was that of the double bed. Separate beds, she had often heard him affirm, struck at the very foundation of married life. They were the thin end of the wedge, the beginning of the end, and a marked indication of the general decadence of marital relationship. That he should tamely submit to being separated from her, filled her mind with the gravest misgivings; nothing could show more plainly the deterioration of his will and the entire change in his mental outlook.

She managed, however, to keep up a brave front, determined that no one should guess the unhappy state of affairs, at any rate while it was possible to hide it from the curious gaze of her neighbours. There was always the chance that Kit would get no worse, that with care and judicious treatment he might even recover altogether; and she wished passionately to avoid, by any means in her power, the stigma of insanity for him and for her two beloved babies.

The secret she therefore decided must remain locked within her own breast. And there no doubt it would have stayed secure if it had not been for the perspicuity of Nurse, who being a shrewd and curious young woman was very soon in possession of the most important part of it. What exactly was wrong with her master she did not know, but something fishy certainly, or why the separate bedrooms?

Why the constant and anxious care ? Why did her mistress look so sad and harassed when alone, so gay and festive when in the presence of other people ? Why were the children kept out of her master's way, and hushed into silence on his return home every evening ? These and similar searching questions she put to the milkman on her Sunday out, when together they walked back from chapel : for she was a good, religious girl, and led him a fine dance if he tried to skip the evening service.

The milkman said he did not know what the game was ; but, if it was him, he should give notice and chance it. A girl he knew in The Crescent was leaving shortly to be married, and there would be a good place going in a week or two ; he would take it upon himself to mention Nurse's name in that quarter if so be as she was agreeable. Which in due course he did, and which probably accounted for the rumour that Mrs. Brown's servants were leaving her owing to the extraordinary behaviour of Mr. Brown.

So that, in spite of Amy's efforts to keep her troubles to herself, all Uppington in a very short time was aware that something was going wrong at Elm Villa ; and, because they could not discover exactly what it was, speculated with their usual wild enthusiasm in all directions save the right one. Amy's reluctance to take anybody into her confidence was regarded as an interesting development of what had at first seemed merely a trifling indisposition. No need, they argued, if nothing were the matter to make such a mystery of it, and the fact that Amy had done so and was persisting, despite the most

tactful and persuasive pumping operations, in still doing so, proved beyond doubt that there was something to hide. That the Browns, of all people, should evolve a mystery, was considered at first a capital joke. The little Browns, who never had a secret in their lives, whose comings and goings had always been for all the world to see, so artless and obvious that nobody had taken the trouble to look !

It was absurd to imagine that anything out of the common could happen in that blameless household, or that if it should do so there would be any attempt made to cover it up—to keep it dark.

And so, what with chaffings and jokings, with relentless cross-questionings and insinuating inquiries, Amy's life was fast becoming a burden to her. She began to avoid her friends, and to refuse invitations where she knew she would have to undergo a bombardment of inquisitive and kindly questions to which she could give no answer.

But there was one place where no prying eyes and no inquisitive tongues ever penetrated, and she grew to regard the house of Mrs. Sutherland as a refuge, a sanctuary of rest. For that enterprising lady had quickly followed up the tea-party with a call on her own account, and the two women, although so unlike in temperament, had become almost friends. It was a relief to Amy to hear her vague, half-expressed fears cheerfully demolished, to see her sprouting forebodings nipped in the bud by the masterful hand of the redoubtable American. For of course, whatever her troubles or difficulties had been, she could never expect an ounce of sympathy



from that quarter. Christian Scientists, having convinced themselves that there is neither pain nor suffering, do not waste their valuable time in sympathizing with the non-existent : a lofty pity for human ignorance is the only solace they are able to offer the unfortunate. To the flabby and invertebrate, to all those poor things who live on the sympathy and consideration of others, this attitude is gall and bitterness indeed ; but Amy was not one of these, she had a sturdy little soul of her own, and she found Mrs. Sutherland's confident and sublime disregard of the shady side of life rather exhilarating than otherwise.

She listened almost with enthusiasm to the inspired writings of Mrs. Eddy, and, if she understood absolutely nothing of their meaning, she was in no worse a plight than many an ardent believer in their infallibility. The constant reiteration of catch-words gave them in her mind a special significance of their own. When she said " There is no Pain," she really meant " I don't believe Kit is going dotty after all." " Love is All, All is Love," seemed to her a very lofty way of expressing her own attitude towards her husband—how nice she was trying to be, how kind and gentle. She developed a cheery optimism, which, had she known it, was diametrically opposed to the true sentiments of Christian Science. For, if you persistently look on the bright side of things, you are thereby admitting that there is a dull side, which, of course, there is not ; and in so doing are committing a sin of Mortal Mind, for which you will have to suffer,



unless you are advanced enough to know that you cannot.

But of these complexities Amy realized nothing. Christian Science, she concluded, was a nice cheery idea if you didn't carry it too far, and it was just on a question of how far to carry it that she had quite a heated argument with her spiritual adviser.

They were sitting in Mrs. Sutherland's special sanctum, a very workman-like room furnished with an immense escritoire, and numerous bookcases filled with C.S. literature. Several easy chairs were dotted about on the thick Turkey carpet, and the apartment presented an air of solid comfort and unostentatious wealth, which Mrs. Sutherland managed to impart to all her surroundings.

"See here," she was saying, "you'll never get any further in Science while you pin your faith to that doctor of yours. Just you think of the mortal mind of that man—full of disease, full of fear. Why, he's the most dangerous person you could have in your house! He brings with him just the vurry things you are paying him to cure, ain't that clear?"

"They don't often do that," apologized Amy, "and I've known them perform some wonderful cures."

"*Never*," cried Mrs. Sutherland; "never in your life. The most that doctors can do is to put you in the right frame of mind for curing yourself, and ninety-nine per cent of them can't even do that. They're not only ignorant," she said, waxing eloquent on a subject that was very near her heart,

"of the great and vital truths of our being, but they don't even know the simple tricks of mortal mind that would perform a so-called cure. Hypnotism, personal magnetism, mental suggestion—they haven't touched the fringe of these things, and thank Gard," she added piously, "that they haven't, or they would do ten times more harm than they do at present."

"All I know is," said Amy, "that Dr. Bennett has helped me in every way, both physically and mentally. He's my stand-by. I couldn't ever give him up—I should be simply lost without him. It's not only that he knows all about illnesses, but he's such a comfort when anything goes wrong with the children. The fact is, I suppose," she continued helplessly, "I'm not strong enough to do without somebody."

"You have this Book," replied Mrs. Sutherland reproachfully, giving it a reverent pat, "all the wisdom in the world is contained between these covers. It is the latest revelation of Gard to us, given to our beloved Leader by Divine Inspiration. The price is one guinea, not more than you would pay for one visit to a so-called specialist. And for that she gives you the certain remedy for all ills, physical and mental."

"I expect I'm quite wrong," sighed Amy, "but somehow I don't care about Mrs. Eddy."

Mrs. Sutherland beamed a smile of ineffable loving-kindness: this confession of Amy seemed for some reason to please her vastly.

"That is, my dear, because you can't conceive what She *is*. Even I, advanced as I am, can only faintly discern the beauty of Her holiness. You don't expect a blind earth-worm to understand the nature of the glorious sun, do you? Very well then," she concluded abruptly, evidently feeling that there was no more to be said.

"No," persisted Amy mildly, "there's something about her that seems to rile me. I like a great deal of what you say, but I can't," she added with an apologetic smile, "quite believe in Mrs. Eddy."

"Vurry well then," said Mrs. Sutherland, who had arguments at her finger-tips ready to meet any and every objection, "I'll just say this one thing to you. Supposing you were thinking of paying a visit to America. Supposing you thought that the climate would be good for your health, and that you had kind friends waiting to welcome you on the other side. And supposing I told you of the wonders of that beautiful country, and described to you all the delightful things you would see there. And suppose you were to shake your head at me and tell me: 'Yes, Mrs. Sutherland, all you say may be true. I don't doubt your word. I know I have kind friends there, and it's a place I've always had a desire to see. But, *all the same*, I shan't ever go to America, because from what I've heard of Christopher Columbus I don't care about his character'!"

She paused and transfixed Amy with her luminous magnetic eyes.

"What sort of a fool do you think you would be then?" she demanded.

Amy laughed. "That's very quaint," she said. "I almost think I could be a Christian Scientist, if I didn't have to give up the doctor."

"Believe me," said Mrs. Sutherland earnestly, "that doctor's going to give you a heap of trouble yet. However, Error destroys itself—through suffering you will learn not to rely on Mortal Mind. We've all got to come to it sooner or later. You think over what I've told you."

While Amy was thinking it over that night before going to sleep, Kit lay in the spare room, alone in the expensive brass bed with its pink silk hangings, wrestling with very different problems in great anguish of spirit. Nearly a fortnight had elapsed since his last meeting with Lebah: a fortnight of such heart-rending misery, that he told himself he could stand no more of it. His infatuation still possessed him to the exclusion of all other interests, and side by side with it, inseparable now from the thought of it, was a fierce passion of jealousy that seemed to corrode his very soul. Often in the long night-watches Vibart's saturnine face would rise out of the darkness, and mock him with its malevolent green eyes, till, goaded to fury, he would spring out of bed and pace the floor in an agony of impotent desperation.

Sometimes, when the gods were kinder, he would lose himself in delicious memories of the last three months: the long hours when he had been able

to gaze his fill on the sensuous beauty of the girl he adored, or finger gently her soft, dusky tresses. He could hear again her low, vibrant voice, and see the cool, disdainful smile hovering round her red lips, while her eyes beckoned him with seductive promise; those deep mysterious eyes, which never yet yielded their secret to him, nor ever fulfilled their alluring promise. Had she, he wondered, simply been playing with him? But, whether she had or not, he was past caring, as long as he might see her again. Desperate measures chased each other through his brain: wild, impossible schemes that he elaborated with painful detail, till he almost persuaded himself that they were practicable.

And, as he lay there that night, he swore that, come what might, on the next day he would see her. If he had to stand outside the door all day; neglect his work; get the sack; and watch his wife and family starve before his eyes,—see her he would.

What exactly he would say to her he hardly knew. There was so much to tell, so very much to ask. But she should hear him out: of that he was determined. And if, driven to desperation, he slew her at his feet, or blew his own brains out, on her head would be the blame. He was prepared for any catastrophe, any emergency: if the end were to be grim tragedy, it would not surprise him in the least.

However, he decided, he would defer buying a revolver until he was quite sure he would want to



use it. He would first find out what exactly her views were, and whether it would be possible to reduce her to reason by any less formidable means. He reflected that much could often be achieved by kindness and persuasion ; and, considering carefully in his mind how very kind and persuasive he had it in him to be to Lebah, his distracted feelings grew gradually calmer, and he dropped off into a sound and peaceful sleep.



## CHAPTER IX

FIVE o'clock on the following afternoon found Kit at the front door of the flat in Shaftesbury Avenue, having decided, in the colder reason of the morning light, not to skip a day's work. But no luck awaited him there, for Lebah was next door, helping her friend Bertha Putt to transform a second-hand tea-gown into a smart frock suitable for her appearance as a lady of fashion in a forthcoming provincial production. It was a long and tiresome job, and Lebah was very bored, had been so before she began ; but one good turn deserves another, and Bertha had already done her turn in securing Lebah her present engagement. Behold, then, Lebah on her knees, her mouth half full of pins, with a fury of impatience in her heart, pulling here, gathering there ; while Bertha, arrayed in the anathematized garment, handed out helpful instructions with an apologetic air.

"A bit tighter, I think," she said, "round the feet. We might leave it open at the bottom if I can't walk in it."

"Merciful Heaven !" sighed Lebah, "I've already taken it in yards. You want it so you can sit down in it, I suppose."

"Well, don't bother, old dear," said Bertha good-naturedly. "You're tired, I can see. Just pin it up round the bottom for me and I daresay I can do the rest."

"No, I'll do it now I've begun," said Lebah with resignation. "Only first you droop on one side and then on the other, I can't see what's straight and what isn't."

"Sorry," said Bertha, bracing herself to a more rigid perpendicular. "How's that?"

"That's better. Look here, I shall have to be off soon, my old freak isn't coming to-night, for some occult reason connected with somebody's funeral, and I've got to cook the grub myself unless I go out somewhere and get it."

"Why not stop here?" asked the hospitable Bertha, "there's some cold ham in the house, if that'll do you?"

"Any old thing," replied Lebah, her head buried in recalcitrant draperies on the ground.

So that, after repeated knockings and a tedious wait of half an hour, Kit decided to go downstairs and wait outside in the hope of catching Lebah on her return to dinner; unless, he reflected, she was really in the flat all the time, in which case he must catch her going out. His determination had in no way abated and he was resolved to take no risks.

When half-past seven struck on a neighbouring clock, it began to dawn on him that she was dining elsewhere.

At eight o'clock he was sitting dinnerless in the

pit of the theatre at which she nightly appeared, not having the courage to venture into the stalls in his city suit of blue serge.

She looked as beautiful as ever, trailing about luxuriantly in her Eastern robes of scarlet and gold. But her expression, Kit thought, was a trifle sad; she seemed to wear an air of almost wistful melancholy, which appealed immensely to him. He wondered if it could be possible that their separation had affected her as deeply as it had done himself: if she were suffering secretly but acutely from the rigid enforcement of her high principles, and the thought uplifted him exceedingly. He could not, of course, know that she had dined off a slice of very indifferent ham and a cup of tea, nor that Jack Vibart was fulfilling an engagement in Bayswater and not expected to put in an appearance that evening.

When the performance was over, Kit hurried round to the stage door, but deciding to risk no possibility of a public snub, which would make it difficult for him to carry out his plan of seeing her alone at the flat, he stood in the shadow of a doorway till she came out of the theatre. He watched her as she strolled along with another girl, then cautiously leaving his shelter he stalked her anxiously through the brilliantly lighted streets, through the hurrying crowds that wended their ways homewards, till at last he saw her disappear with a careless nod to her companion within the portals of the street door that led to her flat.

"Now," thought Kit, "the coast is clear. I will

wait till she gets upstairs, so that she won't know I followed her, which might perhaps annoy her unnecessarily . . . and then . . . then. . . ."

His heart thumped in violent agitation against his ribs, for he had come to a desperate decision—of which more anon.

Ten minutes later he made his way upstairs and stood again outside the closed door. Fate this time guided his hand so that, instead of giving his usual rat-a-tat, he took the knocker firmly by the claw and planted it down three times in succession, three distinct and decisive blows, each one pregnant with his determination to get inside the door.

To his joy they acted like a charm. The door flew open, and there stood Lebah herself, a vivid smile of welcome on her face, which, however, vanished with startling rapidity before Kit could respond to it.

"Well I never!" she exclaimed, distinctly taken aback at perceiving the wrong man on the door-mat, and one, too, whom she had consigned to oblivion.

Kit slipped inside hastily, in case of accidents.

"Found you in at last," he began with a hopeful smile.

"I'm generally in at bedtime," replied Lebah pointedly. "However," she added, "now you're here you'd better come in and sit down a few minutes."

She followed him into the little sitting-room, revolving in her mind how best to get rid of him

in the most speedy and peaceable manner. Kit, however, had naturally no intention of the interview being either short or particularly peaceful, and, seating himself in the familiar wicker-chair, he transfixed her with a prolonged and reproachful gaze, which formed a very fitting preface to the indignant remarks he was about to unload from his overburdened chest.

Lebah smiled faintly, but said nothing, as she balanced herself on the edge of the table facing him. A newly lighted fire was blazing cheerfully on the hearth and lent a spurious air of comfort to the little room, as it flickered on the polished wood of the piano and threw provoking shadows over the girl's face. She was wearing a loosely made frock of Indian red silk, low at the neck and cut short at the elbows to show her slim, well-shaped arms. Her smooth, almost sleek black hair was coiled carelessly round her head, and as she sat there, serenely swinging one well-shod foot with its silver buckle, Kit felt his righteous indignation fade and dwindle; his fiery reproaches grew cold and died, and he was seized with an ardent desire to take her in his arms and kiss her without stopping till the end of time.

Something, however, in the impertinent way she met his eye, warned him to be wary. Somehow she looked remote, almost practical: not the purple-clad, mysterious beauty of his dreams, but a woman of real flesh and blood, to live with, to work for; but first of all and at any cost to be secured.



Lebah herself broke the silence, which was becoming almost oppressive.

"Trot it out," she said lightly, "I suppose you're furious with me?"

"No, no, not exactly," said Kit, "I was hurt, you know. Why wouldn't you see me?"

Lebah glanced speculatively at him, uncertain how to handle him. He might, and probably would, if not judiciously managed, entirely upset her apple-cart, the vehicle in which she had determined to wheel Jack Vibart to the altar. On the other hand, she had a very poor opinion of his fighting powers, and on the strength of this she decided to take the bull by the horns, reckoning, as one so often does, without the bull.

"For about fifteen good and sufficient reasons," she replied lightly, "the chief one being that I didn't wish to."

Kit looked very steadily at her.

"You've treated me very badly, do you know that?" he demanded.

"Not my fault," she replied. "I told you the other day what I felt about your coming here so much; it's only looking for trouble to hang on after that. I shan't change my mind, if that's what you want to know."

She slipped from the table and threw herself back with a sigh into her long chair by the fire.

Kit looked at her, his eyes, after their long fast, feasting on her slim lines and graceful curves. A sudden change had passed over her face: all the impertinence had vanished, and the look of brooding



mystery that always fascinated him lay in her dark eyes.

"Tell me," he said abruptly, "is it because you are afraid of what people will say about us," he moved nearer to her side, "or because you don't care?"

"Both," said Lebah with calm indifference, but she softened her reply with a provoking upward glance at him.

Kit found this rather encouraging; and, kneeling down carefully by her side, he looked earnestly at her as if trying to read her thoughts.

"Lebah," he began appealingly, "can you look me in the face and honestly tell me you don't care, after the way I've loved you . . . after the way you've let me love you? Can you accept all that and give me nothing?"

Lebah's eyelids flickered for a moment. Kit had at last pierced through her defence of indifference. She felt, almost for the first time in the history of their relationship, that something might be due to him. However, it was too late now.

"Yes," she sighed, "that's me exactly."

Her smile was almost shamefaced.

"No, it's not," said Kit. "Do you see, I know you better than you know yourself. I know exactly why you are trying to send me out of your life and I honour you for it—I respect you. Yes," he protested vehemently, as Lebah was about to speak, "I *do* respect you. You are too good for the sort of life you lead, unsheltered, and at the mercy of any blackguard who can manage

to get an introduction to you. What you need is the protection of a good man's love, and that, Lebah," he added with hushed solemnity, "is what I have come to-night to offer you."

He took her hand in his own and looked ardently at her, so carried away by the portentous gravity of the occasion that he hardly noticed when she gently withdrew it.

"I want you," he continued, "to come away with me for good. We will go to a new country and make a fresh start together, to some place where we are not known. Think of it, a little home of our own, always together, just you and I!"

Lebah looked at him curiously.

"And what about Amy?" she asked, "and the children?"

A look of pain passed over Kit's face, and he gazed with a troubled air into the fire.

"I haven't forgotten about her," he said heavily. "She'll be very upset, poor girl. It will be a terrible blow to her; I don't know, I'm sure, how she'll take it. There'll be a divorce, I suppose," he sighed deeply, "a lot of bother and fuss. However," he added philosophically, "I shouldn't be there." He turned again to Lebah. "The fact is," said he recklessly, "I don't care what happens, so long as I don't lose you. I can't bear the thought of living without you. If you send me away, I shall . . . I don't know what I shall do."

"I can tell you," said Lebah coolly, "you'll go back and live happily with Amy again."

"*Never*," said Kit with conviction, "it would be like . . . like eating cake after caviare."

"Cake's better for you," smiled Lebah.

"Ah, Lebah, don't try and tease me!" he cried earnestly. "Why won't you take me seriously? Do you think I'm not a man, with a man's feelings and . . . and . . . passions?"

"I know you are," said Lebah, "and that's why it's time to stop fooling. . . ."

"Fooling!" he cried passionately, "there you are again! I'm *not* fooling. I'm in deadly earnest. I love you. I worship you. Say you'll do as I ask you. When shall we go?"

Lebah regarded him patiently.

"Dear Kit, I'm sure you mean well, but you don't seem to understand. I would never go away with you, simply because I don't care enough about you. I don't love you and I never have done so."

"But you soon will," persisted Kit, "you don't yet realize what a big thing I'm doing for you, what I'm giving you. I'm offering you all my life, my love, my—my everything. What more can you want?"

"I don't want anything, dear boy," said Lebah with resignation, "except . . . it's getting very late and I really think you must go home now."

"Yes," said Kit uneasily, "I know it is, but I can't leave you like this. You've thoroughly upset me. I thought . . ." he started up nervously as three decided taps sounded on the outer

door. "Now who on earth can that be?" he asked anxiously.

Lebah rose with a sudden fear at her heart. Only too well she knew who it was. She stared at the door and then back to the man before her with the hunted look of a trapped animal.

"Who can it be?" asked Kit again in a whisper.

"It's Jack Vibart," said Lebah tensely.

She met his eyes squarely, hiding nothing of her anxiety.

Kit stared hard at her, and read his fate in their troubled depths. Then an ugly look swept over his face, and he turned away from her with an oath.

"I knew it!" he groaned. "I was certain that swine was at the bottom of all this."

The blood surged up into his head and he began to breathe heavily.

Now this was not at all what Lebah had expected, and so unhinged was she at the disastrous turn events had taken that she stood for a moment, unable to speak. A meeting between the two men was what she had tried most desperately to avoid, and she realized almost with panic that, unless she could prevent it now, she was done for in Jack's estimation: for Kit was in no mood to pick his words, and heaven alone knew what he would have to say about her. Suddenly an inspiration seized her, and quick as thought she turned and caught him by the arm.

"If he finds you here with me at this time of

night, I'm done for!" she breathed. "Don't you see, it would ruin me; he mustn't see you."

"Don't let him in, then," said Kit, pulling himself together and considerably helped by the thought of his rival standing outside fuming on the doormat, where he himself had stood so often and so patiently.

"I must," said Lebah, seeing a mental vision of Jack, true to his word, waiting on the mat till dawn. "He may have heard us talking," she explained for Kit's benefit. "Look here," she whispered in agitation, "I know I've been rather a rotter to you, Kit, but will you do just one thing for me now? Will you," she pleaded, "go in that cupboard till I send him away?"

She pointed urgently to a door set in the wall.

"Oh Lord, no," said Kit uncertainly. "No, I can't do that."

"And afterwards I will do any mortal thing you ask me," persisted Lebah frantically, for the raps were repeated on the door with increased emphasis. "He shan't come in; I'll get him off somehow. *Do*, Kit, if you love me!" she begged, pushing him gently toward the wall, "just in case he catches sight of you."

Protesting, he allowed himself to be propelled over to the corner by the fireside, and before he had decided in his own mind on a course which would combine dignity with discretion he found himself squeezed in between a yellow silk petticoat—for this was where Lebah kept her best clothes—and a swiftly closing door.



He heard Lebah's soft rush across the room : heard the click of the opening door and a confused murmur of voices in the hall.

Jack, quite sure of his welcome, walked straight into the sitting-room, put his hat on the table, and began to take off his overcoat. He was in evening dress, and looked very smart and almost cheery.

"Thought you'd gone to bed," he remarked without looking round.

"I . . . believe I've been asleep . . ." said Lebah nervously. "I haven't been in long. . . . I was tired . . . I had a headache. . . ."

"Poor old thing," said Jack genially.

Lebah remained standing, uncertain what to do : in her panic she had not prepared for this contingency. She racked her brains for an idea, and after a frenzied search secured a very brilliant one.

"Oh, I say . . . do you know . . . I really must go round and see how Bertha is . . . she was so seedy this afternoon. . . ."

As she spoke the idea grew in subtlety, and resource, for she reflected that Bertha was going out to supper with a pal, and would not be home till midnight, if then. Her confidence returned to her with this comforting remembrance, and she turned to Jack with almost her usual nonchalance.

"I wish you'd go round for me, will you ? Only the next door upstairs, the top flat, would you ?"

Jack relapsed lazily into an arm-chair by the fire-side.



"Your kind heart does you credit," he said. "I'll let you go if you don't stay longer than five minutes."

Lebah hesitated a moment. She was wondering if Kit would have the sense to let himself out if she very casually unhooked the cupboard door before leaving the room.

"You come too?" she suggested tentatively.

"No," said Jack, proceeding to light a cigarette, "I don't care about the lady. Give her my love."

Lebah promptly relinquished the brilliant idea, and cast about anxiously in her mind for another. She sat down, meantime, uncomfortably on a small chair and looked nervously towards the cupboard in the wall.

"After all," she said, "perhaps I could run in after you go. You won't be long."

There was silence for a few seconds, and presently Jack looked up at her with a critical stare.

"I'm beginning to feel that you've had enough of me already," he said. "What's up?"

"Nothing," replied Lebah carelessly. "I've got a headache. I shall be all right to-morrow. I'm afraid I'm very dull to-night."

Jack looked uncertainly at her.

"You don't look quite at the top of your form," he said. "Are you sure there's nothing the matter . . . nothing upset you?"

"Absolutely no," she insisted. "I know I'm not fit to talk to. Suppose you go away and leave me, I feel an utter bore."

Jack rose with a brief smile.

"Suppose I don't do anything of the sort," he said, advancing towards her. "Suppose you sit down comfortably in that long chair of yours and tell me what you're in such a fluster about."

Lebah rose also, and stood facing him, but taking care to avoid his eyes: her breath came a little faster.

Jack watched her with secret delight. Lebah without her usual cool insouciance was diverting—more, she was wonderfully alluring. He laid his hands on her shoulders and tried to look into her face, and the expression in his agate eyes carried a conviction that would have made Lebah's heart leap for joy, if, because of Kit in the cupboard, it had not quaked horribly with fright.

Jack, she discerned, was dangerously on the point of making love to her ; perhaps even of a proposal, which might or might not require a little delicate manipulation on her part to convert it into the sort of proposition she could accept. At all events, he must be postponed to a more convenient season. But how ? Her eyes drooped before his, not so much from maidenly modesty as to hide the anxious conflict that was taking place behind them.

But Jack, being a very experienced person, knew that drooping eyes tell their own tale, even if it is a chestnut ; and without more ado he folded her silently in his long, sinewy arms.

"I won't kiss you," he whispered softly, "till you want me to."

Inside the cupboard it was getting hot. A

delicate and disturbing aroma hung in the filmy folds of Lebah's best clothes, and strain his ears as he might Kit could not hear a sound. The silence became oppressive. How curious, thought he, that a conversation should collapse so suddenly, for until that moment he had been able to hear every word distinctly. An uneasy feeling grew on him that things were not as they should be, a feeling that was strengthened by a murmur from Lebah, so low that he only just caught the words.

"Not to-day," she said pleadingly. "Please don't!"

"Why not?"

Silence again in the tiny room. Kit with eyes and mouth wide open pressed himself up against the crack of the door, and listened with all his might.

"You're a long time dead, you know," said Jack persuasively, unconsciously using her favourite argument.

Lebah, freeing herself gently from his embrace, looked up at him with an enigmatic smile, and their eyes met: hers smouldering, fathomless, full of meaning; his passionate, vicious, compelling.

It seemed to Lebah that her whole soul rose at his demand, and a wild longing seized her to fling herself again into his arms. She had, moreover, sufficient confidence in her own blandishments to feel sure that, once there, she could dictate her own terms of surrender. And perhaps she was right, but with another lover in the cupboard the poor girl was heavily handicapped. Her silence, thought

Jack, was adorable. That hint of mystery in her eyes, together with the delicate reluctance she showed, roused him to a pitch of enthusiasm of which he had hardly believed himself capable. His pulse quickened and a curious dark flush spread over his saturnine face, his long bony hand trembled as he held it out to her.

"Look at me!" he said, with a quick, hoarse laugh. "See what a pitiable state I'm in! Aren't you going to . . . Good God! . . . what's that?"

And indeed a mighty crash resounded through the air, for Kit had, as he put it, "had enough," and throwing his whole weight against the flimsy door burst open his prison and stood before them, scarlet in the face and panting with rage and exertion.

"Damn you, leave her alone!" he cried, thrusting himself roughly between the two.

After that first startled exclamation, Jack quickly resumed his wonted imperturbability, and fixing his monocle carefully in his eye he regarded the infuriated Kit as if he had been some rare and interesting insect.

Lebah's hysterical gasp resolved itself into a frank chuckle of amusement, as she subsided into the nearest chair. The situation had become quite impossible, and with her usual philosophy she was prepared to make the most of the dramatic turn events had taken.

"Why do you keep him in the cupboard, Lebah?" inquired Jack suavely.

"I ought never to have gone there," spluttered Kit with heat.

"Quite," agreed Jack coldly, "but having gone I think I should have stayed there."

"And listened calmly while you made love to her!" exploded Kit wrathfully. "No thank you, not much, not if I know it."

Jack's eyes glinted dangerously, but not a muscle of his face moved as he turned to the girl who a moment before had been in his arms. Lebah met his gaze unflinchingly. With all her faults she never lacked courage in a tight corner, and the situation was one, moreover, entirely after her own heart, whatever the result might be.

"Do you see," she began expansively, "I put him in there, because I heard you coming and he's so wildly jealous of you. I knew he'd make a fool of himself."

"No," said Jack savagely, "I'm the fool. I'm a pathetic spectacle, I quite see that."

Lebah looked a trifle apprehensive. Matrimony or not, she had no intention of losing Jack, and her anger rose at the sight of Kit standing there between them; for that valiant lover, perceiving that his inopportune appearance was likely to cause a quarrel, and possibly a rupture of their relations with one another, made no effort to hide his satisfaction.

"I told you about him," she said nervously, "the other day, don't you remember? this is him."

"Yes," supplemented Kit, "I've known Lebah a long time," he looked Jack boldly in the face;



"she belongs to me and I don't care who knows it."

"*What?*" almost screamed Lebah, her eyes blazing with sudden passion. "How dare you tell such a wicked lie?" she turned swiftly to Jack. "He came here to-night," she said recklessly, "to try and persuade me to go away with him; didn't you?" she asked angrily of Kit.

"That's right," said Kit.

"And I refused flatly, didn't I?" pursued Lebah, eyeing him with active hostility.

"Well," temporized Kit, "you didn't exactly say yes."

Lebah faced him with stormy eyes.

"Didn't I say most distinctly that I never would? Didn't I tell you that I cared nothing about you and would have nothing at all to do with you?" she demanded angrily. "How dare you say I belong to you? What do you mean by your infernal lies? Get out of my house and never set foot inside my door again, you poisonous little toad!"

Her breast was heaving with almost uncontrollable excitement, her eyes were black with fury as she pointed to the door with a long, slim forefinger.

To say that Kit was astounded, in no way expresses his utter amazement at her complete change of front. A slow thinker himself, he found it impossible to readjust his position at such short notice, and this inability stood him in good stead, for he held his ground, and a look of stolid resolve crept into his face.

"I shan't go," he said sullenly. "If anyone is to go, let him."

"Perhaps he's right," said Jack cordially, taking up his hat.

But Lebah flew to him.

"No, Jack," she cried, "put him out for me; pitch him down the stairs. I won't have him here."

Jack laid his hat down again carefully on the table.

"It's nothing to do with me," he said indifferently, "but if you want him put out, of course he must go."

He eyed Kit with cool speculation, as if considering which end to take hold of him.

"Must he, indeed?" snarled Kit, nettled equally by the words as by the tone in which they were spoken. "You'd better try and do it, then."

Quick as thought Jack sprang forward, and catching the other's arm in his steel-like fingers he twisted it deftly behind him; but before he could get the leverage, which would have rendered his opponent helpless, Kit slipped on a corner of the hearth-rug and fell heavily sideways, his head crashing with a sickening thud against the edge of the fender.

For a full minute he lay there like a felled ox, while Jack recovered his balance, and Lebah stood over him with horrified eyes.

"He's bleeding!" she exclaimed, all her anger evaporating at this new catastrophe.

Jack knelt down on the carpet and examined him carefully.

"Yes," he said shortly, "he's cut his head a little, it's nothing much."

"But why doesn't he come round?" she asked fearfully. "I hope to goodness he's not hurt."

"No fear," replied Jack, without looking at her, "only a slight concussion, I think. Better get some brandy, if you have any."

Lebah hurried to the sideboard and returned a moment later with a decanter of spirit and a tumbler.

"Do you want some water?" she asked meekly.

"No," said Jack. "Pass it here, and a spoon."

He took the bottle and poured out half a tumbler of brandy with a careless hand, then with a spoon he forced a few drops between the teeth of the unconscious Kit.

Lebah watched him anxiously, and in a few minutes saw, to her intense relief, that the spirit was having the desired effect. Kit opened his eyes and moaned feebly.

"Drink some of this," said Jack, slipping an arm under his head to raise it slightly.

Kit closed his eyes again with a groan and made no reply.

"Come along," said Jack impatiently; "once you get this down, you'll be all right; you're not much hurt."

"Yes I am," groaned Kit, "my head's frightful; it's a wonder I wasn't killed."

Jack stopped further lamentation by summarily raising the glass to his lips, and despite the vigorous protests of his victim pouring some of the liquid into his mouth.

"Wait a minute," spluttered Kit. "I'll sit up."

He raised himself with difficulty and, taking the tumbler in his own hands, drained the contents to the last drop.

"It tastes very strong," he choked. "I hope you haven't given me too much?"

The spirit revived him; he struggled to his feet and lurched over to the divan, on to which he carefully lowered himself and lay back with an exhausted sigh.

Lebah stood watching him for a few minutes.

"Are you feeling better?" she inquired presently, crossing over to the sofa and bending down to him.

"No," said Kit faintly, "not much, my head aches."

He raised his hand to feel the bruised place, and withdrew it sharply.

"It's wet!" he cried in alarm. "*Blood!*" he exclaimed, looking with dismay at his fingers, which showed traces of a slight abrasion.

Lebah took a tiny handkerchief out of the bosom of her dress, a fine and delicately scented trifle, and gently wiped the place.

"It's really nothing," she assured him. "See, very little blood, only a mark."

Kit took the handkerchief from her and tried again, to make quite sure. Perceiving no signs of

hæmorrhage, he fell back on to the cushions and closed his eyes again.

Jack meanwhile had been standing with his back to the couple, gazing into the fire, his reflections being, to judge by his expression of restrained ferocity, not of a very pleasing character.

As Lebah left the couch, he turned and faced her. Anger was in his eyes, but his tone was cold and even.

"There's nothing much the matter with him, he'd better have a cab and go home. Where does he live?"

"Somewhere in Uppington, I don't know exactly," replied Lebah, in a matter-of-fact tone to match his indifference. "He goes from Waterloo Station, would you mind looking up to see what time there is a train? There's a time-table on that shelf there."

Kit showed not the faintest interest in this conversation. He lay perfectly still, taking long deep breaths, and emitting occasionally a faint moan. He had eaten nothing since his luncheon at one o'clock and the brandy was mounting to his brain in the most comforting way. He was already long past caring in the least what time the train left Waterloo.

"Eleven-fifty," said Jack, looking at the time-table. "That's the last train to-night. It's now eleven-thirty," he added, after a glance at his watch, "if he's going to catch it he must go at once."



Lebah went back to the sofa and touched him on the shoulder.

"Kit, you'll have to go now, or you'll lose the last train home."

"I can't move," said Kit faintly. "I feel too ill to get up."

"There's nothing the matter with you," said Jack roughly, "you can get up all right if you want to."

No fitting retort occurred to Kit's benumbed brain, so he maintained a dignified silence.

"Come along," urged Lebah. "I'll help you on to your feet."

Kit looked at her with dull, uncomprehending eyes.

"I'm not going home," he muttered. "I'm all right here ; leave me alone."

Lebah watched him with growing concern.

"You've given him too much brandy, Jack," she said. "I believe he's going to sleep."

"Very likely," replied Jack indifferently, reaching for his coat in order to hide a flicker of a smile that played about his grim features.

Lebah stared at him in amazement.

"Good gracious, Jack !" she cried, "you're surely not going to leave him here with me alone ?"

"He's your guest, not mine," said Jack coolly, putting on his coat.

"I think it's unkind of you," retorted Lebah with some heat. "You know I had nothing to do with him coming here. It just happened that he knocked three times on the door, and I

thought it was you, or I should never have let him in."

But Jack was in no mood to listen to explanations.

"My fault entirely," he said pleasantly, "it was an unearthly hour to call."

Lebah caught the savage glint in his eye, and her heart failed her as she looked in despair at the form of the now soundly sleeping Kit on the sofa.

"He can't stay here all night," she said helplessly, "and he's lost the last train home. What are you going to do about him?" she asked, looking him full in the face.

"Just whatever you like," said Jack obligingly, "if I can help you in any way?"

Lebah's eyes flashed.

"For heaven's sake," she cried furiously, "get him out of this. I don't care what you do with him. Hand him to the nearest policeman; pitch him out of the window; do anything you like. I wish I'd never set eyes on the fool!"

Jack smiled grimly to himself as he crossed over to the sofa and began prodding the unconscious Kit.

"Come along," he said curtly. "Up you get. You're going home now."

Remonstrance was of no avail this time, and so with many groans and grunts Kit struggled to his feet, and into his overcoat and hat.

It was a tedious job for an impatient man getting him downstairs, but eventually, with one hand on the banisters and propped up on the other side by Jack Vibart, Kit managed to stagger to the bottom and out into the street. Still dizzy from the effects of

his fall, and drugged with the half-tumblerful of raw spirit, he felt the pavement reel under his feet, and saw all the lamp-posts lurching in opposite directions. Clinging for safety to Jack's arm, he was dimly aware of a taxi panting in front of him ; and a moment later had relapsed thankfully and without question into its cushioned depths.

"Look here," said Jack to the driver, "I haven't time to go home with him myself. Do you know Roseberry Gardens, Bayswater?"

"Yessir."

"Number eight."

"Yessir."

"That's right," said Jack, pulling out half a crown, "but in case he's any trouble, here."

The man took the coin with a grin, he had taken home many a fare of this sort, and the car glided easily off, down the almost empty street.

The housemaid at number eight Roseberry Gardens, dragged out of her warm bed to answer the door, proved too indignant even to argue with—and ten minutes later the car drew up before the nearest police station.

## CHAPTER X

THE shock of hearing himself addressed in stentorian tones by a burly policeman effectually aroused Kit from his peaceful slumbers.

He found it difficult for the moment quite to remember the train of events, which had reduced him to his present position, and for one panic-struck instant he wondered wildly if he had done anything for which he could be locked up. This reflection had a very sobering effect on him, and with a determined effort he pulled himself together and sat up straight in his seat.

"What do you mean?" he demanded with some dignity of the interrogative police officer. "I am on my way home and I missed the last train from Waterloo."

"Where do you live?" asked the constable, without much respect.

"In Uppington," replied Kit, hoping no further details would be required.

"First I've heard of it," interpolated the chauffeur. "The gent says to me 'take 'im to Roseberry Gardens, that's where 'e lives,' he says, clear as mud."

The policeman pulled out a notebook.

"What gent?" he asked.

"The gent as put 'im in the car; 'e couldn't get in by himself, not then 'e couldn't; he was too drunk."

"I was nothing of the kind," said Kit angrily.

"I . . . I had a fall . . . an accident. . . ."

"Where?" inquired the constable, writing busily, "in the street?"

"No," replied Kit laconically, "not in the street."

"Do you wish to make any charge?" inquired the officer with a judicial air.

"Not . . . no . . ." said Kit uneasily, "that is . . . don't trouble yourself, constable. I feel quite all right now. I think I'll go straight home." He addressed himself to the chauffeur. "Can you drive me to Uppington to-night?" he demanded.

"I could," demurred the man, "if I was to go and fill up with petrol. But do you see, gov'nor, it's after twelve o'clock, and I shouldn't care to do it, not unless you was to offer me something substantial. It's a long way, and I should have to come all the way back again."

"All right," said Kit, whose head ached violently, and who felt that a fiver would be well spent if it deposited him safely back at his own fireside again.

So the driver climbed up into his seat and started off on another attempt to take his fare home,



chuckling to himself at his piece of good luck, for fivers did not often come his way.

Lying back in the dim gloom of the car, Kit tried to think : tried desperately to realize his position. That Lebah should have refused his offer to elope with her, hardly concerned him at all ; indeed so deeply was he impressed with the consequent proceedings that he had almost forgotten that any such offer had been made. Moreover, her conduct had been so abominable, so lacking in all womanly delicacy and feeling, that even when he recalled her rejection of him it was with a lively sense of thankfulness and relief. " Poisonous little toad " indeed ! That somehow lingered in his mind. What an escape from such a virago ! He wondered how on earth he could have imagined that he loved her. He told himself that from now and henceforth he hated her with an abiding hatred. He cursed himself for a blind fool not to have seen through her long ago. Vibart was a fitting mate for such as she, and he wished them joy of each other.

He had only a hazy idea of what had happened in the flat. Jack, he imagined, had not only knocked him down and rendered him senseless, but evidently had given him with malicious intent far too much brandy while he was still unconscious. Not content with this miserable revenge, he had further been such a vindictive devil as to furnish the chauffeur with a wrong address at the other end of London, for the express purpose of putting him in an absurd, and possibly dangerous predicament. For Kit had

no doubt that if he had not been able to explain himself satisfactorily, he would have, by this time, been locked up in a police cell for the night.

The longer he reflected on the scandalous behaviour of those two and the disgraceful way in which he had been treated by everybody all round, the more angry he grew, till his blood literally boiled in his veins with indignation.

And then, like an icy cold little douche, came the thought of Amy. *What would Amy say?*

That simple question seemed to reduce the temperature of his blood wonderfully. It put it quite off the boiling-point. It cooled it down so suddenly, and with such startling efficiency, that he was conscious of a severe chill; he almost shivered as he wondered what Amy would say.

The car seemed to be rushing along at a frightful speed. Every moment was taking him nearer home, nearer Amy and her questioning eyes. Perhaps it would have been better to have gone straight to an hotel and waited until the morning to have it out with Amy. He wished that the idea had occurred to him before. There seemed no doubt now that his deception of her, his unfaithfulness—for that was what Amy would call it—must all be brought to light. He must tumble from that high place in her estimation which he had always, and quite deservedly he felt, up to the present occupied. He would have to grovel; to ask for forgiveness; to humble himself in the dust, to his own wife, to the one person in the world before whom

he felt he really could not humble himself in the dust. Moreover, it would be so bad for her. It would inevitably put things on a very improper footing between them, if his rightful authority should be diminished. It might even give Amy a trying air of superiority, which he had sometimes noticed, and always disliked exceedingly, in other women. She would never be able to forget it. Women were like that. He felt annoyed with all women for being so tiresome, so inquisitive and censorious, that a man couldn't get himself into a frightful hole without their making things worse by waiting for him on the doorstep to know what it was all about.

He imagined himself going into the dining-room : she would, of course, be sitting up, terribly alarmed at his absence, pathetically pale and anxious. He tried to think what she would look like when he told her where he had been—and why. A vulgar brawl over an actress living in Shaftesbury Avenue ! No one would blame her if she refused to believe his protestations of innocence ; he was well aware that the whole proceedings looked very much more scandalous than they really were. Suppose Amy was so incensed against him that she went away and left him ! He knew that with all her soft, appealing ways she had within her an independent spirit, something that he preferred to call obstinacy. Supposing she broke up the home and took the children to live with her parents, and left him homeless, stranded, all for something that he

had not done? The fact was, he argued to himself, that women do not understand how these things happen to a man. Wives at any rate never do. And after all he was no worse than many other men, and a great deal better than most. On the whole, perhaps, it would be wiser to say nothing to Amy about it. He had learned a useful lesson. Such a thing could never happen again. Better for the sake of every one to forget the whole episode and make a fresh start.

But how to account for the damaged head and the extraordinary arrival home in a taxi from town at two o'clock in the morning? Kit was never inventive in his most inspired moments, and the terrific pace at which the taxi was speeding him along in the direction of Uppington completely unnerved him. They must be, he thought, not very far from home now. Only a few miles perhaps. And he had nothing ready: no convincing story to present to Amy. He already felt almost giddy from the unwonted exertion of thinking so hard, yet the harder he thought, the more perplexing did the problem become, the more difficult of solution.

An accident of course. But where? How? When?

He racked his brains to try and imagine an accident that should sound quite trivial and ordinary, but would at the same time account for about nine hours of the day: that is, from five p.m. when he left the office, to two a.m. when he arrived home. It would also have to include a cut and badly bruised head.

He could think of nothing. He doubted if there was such an accident in all the annals of misfortune.

And despair seized him.

The car had turned into the road in which he lived. It was whizzing along like a malignant demon dragging him to his doom. His mind became a perfect blank. He could neither think of what to say nor decide what not to say; and the car was stopping at the gate!

His bones, like those of the Psalmist, turned to water at the thought of what lay before him; he could hardly raise himself to his feet.

But, as he stepped out of the car, suddenly a most luminous idea flooded his mind, and filled it with an overwhelming joy and peace. It was nothing short of a heaven-sent inspiration. No time, certainly, to consider it, but it was such a beautifully simple idea that it needed no consideration. Anybody could work it at a moment's notice. It required no practice, no preparation to use. And it was the most convincing explanation of his adventures that could be devised.

He walked up the garden path and let himself in with his latchkey, bidding the chauffeur wait because he only had three pounds, ten shillings in his pocket, and proposed to borrow the rest of the fare from Amy.

Almost as he entered the door, she flew out of the dining-room.

"Kit, my darling!" she cried, just as he had expected. "I've been so anxious and worried about you. Where on earth have you been?"



Kit was serene. Calm and full of confidence he was. The great idea upheld him.

"Can you let me have thirty shillings," he asked, "to pay the man?"

She peered into the darkness and saw the glaring headlights in the road.

"A taxi!" she exclaimed. "Yes, I'll go and get it for you."

Upstairs she ran, to the wardrobe, and foraged for a bag, from which she hastily extracted another bag, which in its turn yielded a purse: and from the purse she took thirty shillings, and flew downstairs again.

Kit went outside and paid the man in silence, came back, closed and carefully bolted the door and returned with his wife to the dining-room. He did not feel quite so buoyantly confident now, but, nevertheless, capable, so he hoped, of carrying out the great idea.

"Well?" said Amy, turning to him. "What happened; where have you been?"

"I don't know," replied Kit simply.

"*You don't know!*" Amy's eyes were like saucers.

"No," said Kit; "I think I must have had a lapse of memory. You've heard of that, haven't you?" he asked with some anxiety.

"Y . . . yes," said Amy, "I think so."

She was looking at him with a puzzled, apprehensive expression. Was this, she wondered, the beginning of the end?

Kit subsided into his huge arm-chair with a sigh

of exhaustion ; he closed his eyes. Very composed and self-possessed he was.

" When did . . . did it come on ? " asked Amy, not knowing where to begin.

" When I left the office," replied Kit readily.

" And when did you wake up ? "

" When I took the taxi home, finding I had lost the last train." He felt that this very effectually closed all possible avenues of inquiry. There was practically no more to be said.

Amy, however, was deeply interested.

" Where were you when you came to ? " she asked. " Where did you find yourself ? "

" I'm not sure," replied Kit. " I was rather dazed. I saw the taxi there, and hailed it. Awful expense," he added, " but there was nothing else for it ; and I knew you'd be anxious, otherwise I might have stayed in town all night."

" Of course," said Amy vaguely. " Was the taxi on a stand, or going along the road ? "

" Going along the road, slowly," said Kit, feeling that he was coming through this very well.

" I wish I'd kept the man," said Amy thoughtfully. " I could have asked him what you seemed like when you hailed him and where you were at the time ; that would be a great help."

Kit thought not, but refrained from saying so.

Amy could hardly take her eyes off him. Sooner or later he knew she would see the bruise on his head, but no good to meet trouble half-way.

" Good gracious ! " she exclaimed, as if reading his thoughts. " Whatever have you done to your

head? It's all cut and . . . do let me see it." Her soft fingers were lifting the hair from his forehead in a moment.

"Oh that," said Kit. "I must have had a fall, or something, I suppose. What's it like—pretty bad, isn't it?"

Amy was all concern.

"My poor darling," she said. "What a blow you must have had, can't you remember *anything* about it?"

"Not a thing," said Christopher helplessly.

"It's very strange," muttered Amy. "I can't make it out at all."

"Don't you bother your head about it, Amy," advised her husband. "People often have a lapse of memory, it's nothing very serious; you see cases in the papers every day, in fact it's quite common. The memory goes," he waved his hand airily, "sometimes it comes back; more often not. There's nothing to worry about. I shall be quite all right to-morrow, after a night's rest."

"I can't help worrying," said Amy. "Doesn't that fearful bruise hurt you?"

"Not now," said Kit. "It was awful at first."

Amy was on to this like a flash of lightning.

"At first?" she asked eagerly. "You remember that? What were you doing at the time?"

"I wasn't doing anything," said Kit, uneasy under her searching gaze.

"But were you lying down, or standing up, or what?"

"I . . . I was, standing up, I think."

"Where, in the street?"

"That I can't tell you," replied Kit, determined that nothing should induce him to part with any more incriminating particulars.

"But darling, *think*. You had just received a nasty blow. Can't you remember whether you were in a hospital, or a shop, or outside in the street when you first felt the pain? Were there a lot of people about, or were you alone?"

Kit made a desperate effort to recollect something of a safe and non-committal character, but on second thoughts gave it up and assumed an injured air.

"It's no good, Amy. My mind's a perfect *blank*. And I can't help thinking you might consider my feelings a little. It's not very kind to worry me with questions like this. My head aches badly, and I feel very hungry and not at all well."

"Oh, you poor darling," cried Amy, "how selfish of me."

She was all tender anxiety at once. She ran into the kitchen and returned a few moments later with a tray laden with bread and cheese, half of a cold apple tart, and a large plum cake. Carefully she laid it on the table by her husband's side. Then, going to the sideboard, she produced a decanter.

"Have some brandy," she urged, "it will do you good."

But Kit eyed the bottle with acute disfavour.

"I couldn't touch it," he said. "Put it away, for goodness' sake."

## CHAPTER XI

**J**ACK VIBART wended his way back to his hotel with very mixed emotions ; but, being unused to introspection of any kind, he was hardly aware of anything except a savage desire to kick somebody very violently and at once. It was a slight satisfaction to contemplate the indignation of Brown when on recovering his senses he found himself at the other end of London to where he would fain be ; but the feelings of Brown mattered hardly at all, he regarded him only as the outward and visible sign of Lebah's treachery. When he reflected how near he had been to making love to her, how very real his need of her had been at that fatal moment, the person whom he longed to kick most was himself. For he realized that his feelings had not been those of a seeker after the fleshpots ; not those of a worldly and unsophisticated person such as he knew himself to be. When he folded Lebah in his arms, he had experienced a thrill of genuine emotion, the sort of emotion that drove men to make irretrievable fools of themselves, the sort that he had for many years most sedulously avoided. Whether exactly he would have gone so far as to ask her



to marry him, he did not know. He fervently hoped he could never be such a fool as to contemplate so suicidal a proposal. But undoubtedly it had been a near thing. Angry as he was with Brown, he could almost forgive him for bursting out of the cupboard at that critical moment.

And yet. . . .

Something was hurting him inside. Something seemed to burn and sting: an indefinable pain of sorts that was neither wounded pride nor thwarted passion.

He thought of Lebah as she stood there on the threshold to watch him down the steps. He saw the desperate appeal in her dark eyes, heard her defiant tremulous "good night." He could almost for an instant feel her again in his arms; but he put the thought roughly from him with a curse. She had fooled him, as all women fool all men; and he was doubly a fool to have expected anything else.

He decided he would not go near her again, and turned into bed in a very unchristian frame of mind.

The next morning he awoke to find his rage and disappointment hardly abated in the least. He cursed savagely at his own visage as he shaved it before the looking-glass, and ardently wished himself back in Nigeria, where the relations between the sexes were on a different footing, and women were kept in the place designed for them by nature; where, moreover, there were no irksome restric-

tions inflicted by an effete civilization. He found himself yearning to go round to Lebah's flat and shake her thoroughly, yearning at the same time to pack up his bags and betake himself to a remote part of the earth, where he could by no possibility ever see her again.

However, true to his philosophy, he tried to banish from his mind these disturbing thoughts, and so far succeeded that he was able to go round directly after breakfast to the garage where dwelt a much-desired motor car, and discuss its advantages with the mechanic in charge without any outward and visible signs of the conflicting emotions that beset him.

"How'd it suit you, sir," inquired the mechanic, "to take her a trial run this morning?"

"Good idea," said Jack, suddenly struck with another. "Could you take me as far as Uppington? I want to call and see some one there."

"Certainly, sir; in about half an hour?"

"Yes," said Jack. "Call round at the hotel for me, will you? I want to take a parcel down with me."

"Very good, sir, ten o'clock. I'll be there."

Thus Fate uses these two innocent young men for her own fell purpose!—one with his car to sell and the other with his ruffled feelings to soothe, both obedient to the same law that makes slaves of us all.

While the car is running smoothly down to Uppington, we will leave the two men discussing her points—a subject about which we know nothing and which we intend to leave carefully alone—and

hie ourselves down to Elm Villa, to see how Mr. and Mrs. Kit Brown are faring after the harrowing events of the preceding evening. Amy was, of course, up early, for there was much to be done, and she was not a lady to let the grass grow under her feet. By eight o'clock she had already written a couple of letters, both of the utmost importance: one to her mother in the Midlands, and one to Kit's father in Hull, each of them containing the history of her husband's unaccountable breakdown. She said that while she did not wish to alarm them, she felt it was a duty to let them know what had occurred. That she had every confidence in the doctor who was at present attending him, and would wire if "anything happened" and she needed their assistance. A further note was secretly despatched by Nurse to the doctor, bidding him call as soon as possible, and informing him briefly of what had taken place. So far her work was simple. It was when she tried to induce Kit to breakfast in bed that difficulties arose, which it needed all her tact to overcome. For Kit was inclined to catch the nine-thirty up to town as usual, and could see no reason for staying in bed. Amy, however, had not been married six years for nothing. She did not make the fatal mistake of advising him to stay where he was and take care of himself. Instead, she looked at him with soft pity and remarked what a poor funny old object he was with that lumpy forehead.

"Does it show much?" asked Kit, feeling it anxiously.

"It makes you look rather lop-sided," said Amy. "I ought to have bathed it last night. Perhaps if I did it now you could go up by a later train, or after lunch, or, need you go at all to-day?" she inquired coaxingly, knowing very well that, whether he need or not, he never would.

"Of course I must go," said Kit, who believed, like the rest of us, in his own indispensability.

"Then I'll telephone," said Amy hastily, "and say that you'll be up later, that you're not very well this morning. And if you lie quietly in bed, I'll get some stuff and put a bandage on your head to take the swelling down, and make you presentable."

So he was persuaded. The fire was lighted to make the room cosy, and by half-past nine he was sitting up in bed with a bandage round his head, absorbing hot buttered toast and strong tea, while Amy read aloud to him the bits he liked best in the morning paper.

For over an hour she beguiled him with her wifely attentions, carefully avoiding any reference to the events of the previous evening; and, as her husband was equally anxious to do the same thing, perfect harmony reigned in the sick-room.

At last her listening ears caught the sound of footsteps coming up the path, and excusing herself she slipped downstairs to meet her friend and counsellor at the front door, so that his professional knock should not arouse any suspicion in the mind of the patient upstairs. There was no nervousness

this morning in her greeting. Manfully she had taken the helm, and a sense of responsibility lent her confidence and gave her a wistful dignity that sat strangely on her childish little face. Silently she lead Dr. Bennett into the dining-room, and there in earnest tones she told him the story of Kit's arrival at two o'clock that morning, of his bruised and battered condition, and of his strange inability to account for the time that had elapsed since he left his office at five o'clock in the afternoon. The doctor was deeply impressed. He admitted that this development, to the lay mind so inexplicable, had not been altogether unforeseen on his part. He would, however, commit himself to nothing further until he had seen the patient.

"Of course," said Amy, "he does not expect you. I thought it better not to excite him, he might have objected to seeing you, and that would have made things more difficult."

"Quite," agreed the doctor, "very wise of you. I think, if I may, I should like to go up to him alone. I shall be better able to judge his condition if I have half an hour's quiet chat with him. But," he added gravely, "I won't disguise from you, Mrs. Brown, that this is probably a specialist's job, we shall have to get another opinion."

"Very well," said Amy simply. "Of course everything possible must be done for him; his father has plenty of money."

So the doctor went upstairs alone, and Amy into the kitchen to see Cook and arrange about meals for the day. And, having disposed of Cook, she betook



herself to the nursery, which the children had not yet been allowed to leave because Father had a headache.

And meantime Jack Vibart, in his new car—for he had decided by this time to buy it—was himself driving it slowly along the High Street. He did not know exactly the way to the house where his American aunt lived, except that it was beside the river and near to a large and very ugly church. The church obviously loomed up ahead of him, and he was just on the point of stopping to ask the way from a passer-by, when Mrs. Sutherland herself hove in sight, bent, as it transpired later, on a mission of loving-kindness to Mrs. Christopher Brown.

Jack, although he had not seen his aunt for some years, recognized at once her imposing gait and her elaborate white coiffure, and stopped his car as she approached, leaving it in charge of the chauffeur while he descended to greet her.

“Waal naow!” she exclaimed with delight. “An’t that jest lovely of you to come all this way to see me. My word, I’d have been reel mad if I’d got back home and found I’d missed you.”

“Aren’t you going back now?” inquired Jack. “I’ve brought a parcel for you, rather a gruesome thing; I hope you won’t hate it too horribly.”

“That’s reel nice of you,” said his aunt. “I know I’ll love to have it whatever it is. Could you run me along in your car to where I have to

leave these books? They're for a little friend of mine and I promised them to-day. Then we could go back home together."

"Right-O," said Jack. "Jump in."

Five minutes later the new car stood puffing before the gate of Elm Villa, and from it descended Mrs. Sutherland, her holy books under her arm.

"I shan't stay a minute," she said. "You better jest come along with me. She won't mind me taking you in, I know, and I want you to see her, she's as pretty as a picture."

"Certainly," said Jack, whose only aim was to be agreeable. "I'm expiring to see her."

They were shown into the dining-room, and after a few moments Amy appeared, a little flushed from a romp with the children, yet with anxiety lying deep in her wistful blue eyes.

"Waal naow," began Mrs. Sutherland, with her usual formula, "I hope you're not too busy for visitors. I know what a good little housewife you are."

"Not a bit," said Amy. "How do you do?"

"My nephew, Captain Jack Vibart," proceeded Mrs. Sutherland, introducing him with an airy wave in his direction.

Amy smiled and held out a friendly hand, which Jack took in his own, thinking to himself that he had never seen such a charming little creature, so simple too, like a lovely wild rose growing in this remote suburban garden.

"I met him in the High Street, on his way to see me," continued Mrs. Sutherland, "in a beautiful

new car, extravagant person. He's only been back from Nigeria three weeks; he always lives in these outlandish places. Strange taste, isn't it?"

"But I think people who travel about are always so interesting," said Amy with a polite smile at Jack.

"I'm glad to hear you say so," replied he with alacrity. "I'll come and see you again if I may."

Amy blushed slightly at this unexpected reply and looked prettier than ever.

"You shall take us out for a nice drive in your car, Jack," said his aunt. "I will invite you to stay with me and we'll go every day for a fortnight. But we shall have to take your husband too sometimes," she added, turning to Amy, "or he will be jealous."

Amy suddenly remembered that much afflicted person, and her expression changed.

"My *dear!*" she said. "You haven't heard what's happened to Kit, a most extraordinary thing—*he's lost his memory!*"

Mrs. Sutherland looked puzzled.

"Lost it?" she asked vaguely.

"Last night," began Amy impressively, "he didn't come home to dinner. I waited and waited, very anxious, of course, the whole evening. At ten o'clock I sent the maids to bed, and what I went through after that I can't tell you. However, at last, about two in the morning, he turned up in a taxi from town with a horrible bruise on his head, and not the slightest idea where

he had come from, or what he had been doing since he left the office at five in the afternoon."

"How vurry strange!" said Mrs. Sutherland, wondering at once if Christian Science would meet the case.

"Isn't it?" said Amy anxiously. "But do you know I've been very worried about Kit for some time. He's not been himself for ever so long. I'm afraid this means rather a serious thing for him."

"Ah, my dear!" said Mrs. Sutherland, holding up a warning forefinger, "you're afraid. That's just what you must not be. That's not Science, that's an error of Mortal Mind. You'll do your husband no good by holding him in the thought of fear."

"I know," said Amy, "but what can one think when he goes on like this? It's not my own idea. I should never have thought of such a thing if I hadn't seen with my own eyes how queer he's been lately. I've tried and tried to hide it even from myself; I've never said a word to anybody; but he gets worse and worse every day," her voice trembled piteously. "I can't keep it up any longer, my poor Kit is going out of his mind, I know it. I've known it for a long time."

Jack, during the recital of this sad story, had maintained an impassive air of polite concern, which successfully hid both his amazement at finding himself where he was, and his amusement at Kit's ingenious device. But when he saw the

lovely Mrs. Brown in distress, his spirit was moved within him, and he was about to offer some alleviating suggestions, without giving her husband away, when she turned to him, her eyes all dewy with unshed tears.

"I'm afraid, Captain Vibart, I'm boring you with my family troubles, but I don't seem able to think of anything else just now."

"Not in the least," said Jack, with a good deal more veracity than is usual in that hackneyed phrase. "I'm deeply interested. I think these lapses of memory are most extraordinary."

"Do you know anything about them?" asked Amy. "What one ought to do?"

"Not much," admitted Jack, "but I should think," he added helpfully, "that you ought to humour him, don't ask him any questions; he'll soon get over it and be all right again. I know lots of people who . . . who've done that sort of thing; it soon blows over if you don't worry them."

"What he wants," said Mrs. Sutherland impressively, "is a little dose of Christian Science. I would help him with the greatest of pleasure, if you think he would let me."

Jack turned with his brief vicious smile to his aunt.

"I'd like to see you cure him," he said. "How do you start operations?"

Mrs. Sutherland regarded him with composure.

"I don't start operations at all, my dear Jack; there are no operations in C.S. I simply state



the Truth. Mr. Brown is not mad. Mind is not mad, and Matter cannot be. When he realizes that he is perfectly sane, he will be so."

"But of course," said Amy earnestly, "he *does* realize it now. He hasn't the least idea he's mad at all. He takes all this as a matter of course, and that alone shows the state his mind is in."

Overhead, in the spare bedroom, Dr. Bennett was finding his patient a difficult handful to manage. The wound had been dressed, the temperature taken, the pulse counted, and the doctor, after nearly half an hour's conversation, still found the case a most troublesome one to diagnose. The patient appeared to have no sense of the gravity of his condition, and was much more concerned about the bump on his head than about his lapse of memory.

"Lots of people have 'em," he said lightly.

"Certainly they do," replied the doctor, "but that's no reason why you shouldn't take every care of yourself. A man doesn't have a lapse like this unless there's a screw loose somewhere; and what's happened once, may happen again."

"Oh no," said Kit with conviction, "it won't happen again."

The doctor was almost impatient.

"No one can say when it may occur again . . ." he persisted. "At any moment you may suddenly lose your control, and who can say what the result might be? Who knows what you were

doing last night? Supposing it transpired that you had been seized with homicidal mania, and had murdered some one in the street—that's quite possible, you know. I don't say you have done so, but I do say, Brown, that you have been in conflict with some one or something to account for that bruise on your head. It's a perfectly clean wound done by something hard and fairly sharp. You never got it by merely falling down in the street. It's quite possible that unknown to yourself you have been very violent. I must say I should very much like to know exactly what caused it."

"I don't suppose we shall ever know that," said Kit comfortably. "Don't bother about it. You'll see I shall be all right after this, I feel as fit as possible this morning."

"Physically I daresay you do, but I must warn you, Brown, that you are not in a fit state to go back to work; in fact I'm afraid you'll have to stay in bed a few days till I see how you go on. We can't risk any more accidents, you know, you must think of your wife and family, and do what I tell you, like a good chap."

"Look here," said Kit, "you know this is awful rot, doctor. I feel quite all right, and what's more I mean to get up and go to work as soon as ever my head's better."

The doctor regarded him gravely.

"You will make things very difficult both for yourself and for us if you take a tone like that. I only want to do what is best for you and for your family, and if you will help me no doubt we shall

pull you through quite nicely. If not, I'm afraid, old chap, there's a lot of trouble ahead for you. Be a sensible fellow and stay in bed for a few days"

"No," said Kit doggedly, "I'm not going to do anything of the kind. To tell you the truth, doctor, I never sent for you at all. My wife was anxious, I suppose, and did so without consulting me, or you would never have been here."

"Of course she was anxious," said the doctor, "she's been nervous about you for some weeks now. Your wife's a plucky little woman and you shouldn't make things harder for her."

"What do you mean?" asked Kit, frowning, "nervous for some weeks, what about?"

"About your mental condition, it has given her cause for great anxiety. She consulted me a fortnight ago, about you, so you see this development is not altogether unexpected."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Kit, sitting up straight in bed. "What on earth does she mean? Does she want to try and make out that I'm mad? I never heard of such a silly idea! I'm as sane as you are, anybody can see that. Preposterous!"

"Nobody," said the doctor mildly, "ever thinks that they are mad. It's a very common symptom of almost any mental case."

"But I say," demanded Kit, "you don't really think I'm off my nut, do you? I mean . . . tell me straight."

"I don't say so by any means," replied the

doctor. "What I do say is that you are in a very precarious condition. You may, with proper care and treatment, entirely recover your normal state of mind—I have every reason to think that you will do so—but, on the other hand, over-exertion or over-excitement will be very bad for you for some time to come, and only by taking a complete rest in every way will you avoid what may prove to be very serious consequences."

Kit thought this over deeply, and the more he thought about it, the less he liked the look of it.

"I must see Amy," he said, putting one foot out of bed.

The doctor laid a restraining hand on his shoulder.

"Stay where you are, Brown," he said kindly. "There's nothing to get excited about. I will call your wife if you want to see her."

"No," said Kit firmly, pushing away the restraining hand. "I'll go down myself, thank you."

"If you take my advice . . ." persevered the doctor.

But Kit was already getting into his dressing-gown, and a moment later was wending his way downstairs, unwittingly, to his fate.

He felt annoyed with Amy, and desirous of telling her in no measured terms what he thought of her ridiculous suggestion to the doctor, although he was quite prepared to hear that the idea originated with the doctor himself and not with his wife, who was a silly little thing and believed everything she was told. It was, moreover, very necessary that if

such an idea, however absurd it might be, had taken root in anybody's mind, it should be removed without further delay. While he was not exactly anxious about his position, it gave him a distinctly uneasy feeling to realize that at least two people had been watching him for the past fortnight, and had concluded from his behaviour that he was not in his right mind. He felt that if his wife were any sort of a wife at all she would be ready to take her husband's part on such a vital question, and it was almost as much with the idea of getting Amy's support as of giving her a scolding that Kit walked downstairs in his dressing-gown.

No friendly housemaid appeared to warn him of visitors ; no helping hand was held out by his guardian angel, and he opened the dining-room door, all unconscious of what lay before him, and quite unprepared for the horrid shock that greeted him on the threshold.



## CHAPTER XII

**T**O say that Kit was astonished, in no way describes his sensations when he entered the room and saw his enemy Vibart there before him. He could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes. It seemed impossible that so remote and unlikely a person should be seated there on one of his saddleback chairs, talking with a hateful, sinister smile to the wife of his bosom. If the intruder had been an inhabitant from Mars, the shock could not have been greater, for, in Kit's mind, Jack belonged to a world as far removed from his own and Amy's as Mars is from the Earth, and one with which there was as little chance of intercourse—or so he had fondly hoped. So that to find that his rival had bridged the abysmal gulf, had hopped nimbly from one world to another at such short notice, was a blow that shattered all his hopes, drove every idea out of his head, and left him stranded, petrified with amazement, in the doorway.

And hardly less surprised were the occupants of the dining-room, for Mr. Brown in a dressing-gown, his head bandaged, his mouth open, and his eyes nearly bulging out of their sockets, was a rather alarming spectacle.

Amy rose at once, but Mrs. Sutherland was before her, and almost darted up to Kit in her eagerness to treat him naturally, to show to all concerned how little afraid she was of this so-called insanity : in fact, how she realized that there was nothing of which to be afraid.

"How do you do, my dear Mr. Brown?" she gushed effusively, holding her hand high for him to shake.

But Kit was too agitated to do justice to his best company manners, and merely took it absently, with his eyes fixed in a malignant glare on the man behind her.

Whereupon Mrs. Sutherland, finding him so unreciprocal and not quite liking the look of him at such close quarters, retreated in good order to a safe distance.

At last Kit found his voice.

"What are *you* doing here?" he demanded angrily of Vibart, knowing that he could be there for one purpose only, and that the detestable one of giving Kit's secrets away to his wife and spoiling his little whitewashing scheme, which up to the present had worked with such marked success.

Now Jack, although not perhaps quite so surprised as Kit, was equally taken aback by this sudden apparition in the dining-room, but his always impassive face stood him in good stead and he showed no outward and visible signs of perturbation. Looking his irate host straight in the eyes as if trying to convey a wireless message of reassurance, he rose from his chair.

"I beg your pardon," he began politely, "perhaps . . ."

"Why have you come sneaking down here?" thundered Kit, who was much too unhinged to receive anything so intangible as a telepathic communication.

The two women were exchanging nervous glances, Kit's aggressive attitude filled them with alarm: Amy because she read in his behaviour the confirmation of her worst fears, and Mrs. Sutherland because she had a natural horror of the insane that neither Science nor Christianity could ever eradicate, and the fact that madness was a delusion of Mortal Mind had for the moment escaped her notice.

"Look here," said Vibart peaceably. "I don't know what you mean. I came here with my aunt, Mrs. Sutherland."

"I don't care," said Kit angrily, "who you came with; you'd no business to come at all. I consider it a low-down, despicable trick to play on me."

Jack's green eyes went a shade deeper under his heavy brows, but his voice was well under control.

"I don't think you know what you're talking about," he said curtly. "There's nothing despicable that I am aware of in my coming here. Perhaps," he added with a laudable attempt to save the situation, "you are mistaking me for some one else."

"Not likely," snorted Kit, who was thoroughly roused and oblivious of everything except a fierce desire to wreak his vengeance upon his hated

rival, now that further concealment was impossible. "Not likely," he repeated, "with a face like that!"

Jack shut his mouth and made no reply to this invidious remark.

Amy by this time had somewhat recovered her wits; and, shocked by her husband's unwarranted attack on the nice Captain Vibart, she approached him, but timidly withal, and laid a gentle hand on his arm.

"Kitty darling," she said, soft as a cooing dove, "hadn't you better go back to bed?"

"Certainly *not*, Amy," he replied with heat. "I told you before, there's nothing at all the matter with me; why on earth should I go back to bed?"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Mrs. Sutherland, coming up with reinforcements. "That's right, Mr. Brown. Deny the claim of Mortal Mind. Cast out Fear!"

Kit, who had no idea what she was talking about, and whose rage against Vibart was in no way abated by Amy's suggestion that he should efface himself, turned furiously again to the fray. "You know best why you have taken it upon yourself to come down here with your cock-and-bull story."

"I say," interrupted Jack hastily, "you know you're under some extraordinary delusion. I haven't come here to do you any harm, believe me."

"Haven't you?" said Kit incredulously. "Then what have you come for?"

"I just came, as I told you," said Jack patiently, "to see Mrs. Brown. My aunt happened to . . ."

"And who *asked* you to come and see Mrs. Brown?" demanded Kit with fury. "Why can't you leave Mrs. Brown alone? When I want you to know my wife I'll invite you here myself."

He turned somewhat anxiously to Amy.

"I don't know what he's been telling you about me, Amy, but, whatever it is, don't you believe a word of it. I can explain everything. You wouldn't take the word of an absolute stranger, especially of a vicious-looking bounder like him, against your own husband, would you, dear?"

Amy threw a distressed glance at Jack.

"Oh, Kit dear," she cried, "don't say that; he's done nothing at all; it's rather rude to call him names."

"I don't care if it *is* rude," persisted Kit vigorously. "I am the best judge of who comes into this house, and I say that I very much object to him being here *at all*. The sight of him, sitting there, making himself at home with you, is a thing I shall never forget as long as I live."

"Look here, darling," said Amy, going up to her husband with a brave yet anxious smile, "you mustn't be a silly old goose. You see your accident has upset you, and you imagine all kinds of things that aren't true. When your head gets better you'll see how mistaken you are about Captain Vibart."

"There's no mistake at all," said Kit firmly. "I know perfectly well what I'm talking about;



much better than you do, I may tell you. The man's a scoundrel, and I won't have him in the house; and the sooner he understands that the better."

He turned savagely to Jack, and the recollection of certain indignities that he had suffered the previous evening lent force to his words:

"Are you going?" he demanded rudely, "or do you want me to chuck you out?"

Amy glanced nervously at the door. Dr. Bennett, she knew, had not left the house, and she had a shrewd suspicion that he was standing behind it in case of emergencies.

Jack caught the look, and it helped him to control his temper, which was rising considerably. He regarded Kit with composure. "I say," he said, "I wish you'd keep cool, you're frightening Mrs. Brown."

"You leave Mrs. Brown alone!" roared Kit. "I've had quite enough of your interference and mischief-making. What damage you've already done I don't know; but you shan't do any more, I'll take my oath."

"All right," replied Jack with grim resignation. "I'm evidently doing no good here." He held out his hand to Amy. "Good-bye, Mrs. Brown." Then turning to his aunt he added: "I'll wait for you in the car outside."

Mrs. Sutherland rose with suspicious haste.

"I'll come too, Jack," she said, casting a doubtful eye on Mr. Brown who still stood in a threatening and pugilistic attitude.

"Don't leave me," breathed Amy in a nervous aside, "till the doctor comes in. I'll go and fetch him."

"Ah, my dear," said Mrs. Sutherland reproachfully, "cast out Fear. Mortal Mind is full of Fear!"

Kit strode menacingly up to Jack.

"Are you going?" he demanded aggressively.

Mrs. Sutherland seized Amy's hand in great agitation and began to pour out a torrent of incoherent Christian Science, her voice growing louder and more hysterical with every word.

"All is Infinite Mind. There is no Truth, Intelligence or Substance in Matter. Deny the Error of Mortal Mind."

Meanwhile it looked as if at any moment the two men might come to blows. Jack, however, seeing the terrified condition of his aunt, and Amy's no less obvious nervous apprehension, began to move out of the room, saying as he did so to Kit, with a grin:

"All right, old chap, don't get rattled. I'm off now."

But at the prospect of losing her protector, Mrs. Sutherland suddenly broke off in the midst of her harangue and lunged across the room.

"Stop, Jack!" she cried wildly, clutching hold of his arm. "I can't be left alone here with a dangerous lunatic, we must both stay and protect Mrs. Brown."

Jack looked questioningly to Amy for instructions.

"Oh, please wait a minute," she replied in agitated tones, "till I call the doctor; I think he's just in the next room." Instinctively she placed her hand on his other arm.

"Amy!" stormed Kit. "Have you taken leave of your senses? Did you not distinctly hear me order him out of the house? What on earth are you holding on to him like that for? Let go at once!"

Angrily he advanced towards his wife, who by this time was clinging with desperation to his hated rival.

It was enough!

Mrs. Sutherland, seeing him approach with death and destruction in his rolling eye, screamed loudly, as if the end of all things had come, as indeed she thought it had. Amy ran over to the bell and began to pull it violently, till its frantic appeal resounded through the house. Suddenly the door was flung wide open and in rushed the doctor, followed by the gardener, whom he had with great presence of mind summoned from the garden at the first signs of trouble in the dining-room, having, as Amy surmised, been watching events from a safe position on the other side of the door.

Before the bewildered Kit could realize what was about to happen, he was seized from behind by two powerful men, his hands pinioned sharply behind his back, and thrown forcibly into an arm-chair, in which he was held firmly down by Dr. Bennett and the gardener, in spite of his frenzied struggles to free himself.

"Good heavens!" he bawled. "Have you all gone suddenly mad? Let me go, Bennett, you fool. Well, I'm damned."

But resistance was of no use at all, and realizing the helplessness of his position he subsided with disgusted resignation into the hands of his captors.

The pealing of the bell had, of course, quickly brought Cook and Mabel from the kitchen, and Nurse from the nursery, and they all stood gaping in the doorway at the horrible sight which met their eyes: their poor master gone clean off his head, and kicking the doctor something cruel.

Amy relapsed weeping into the nearest chair, and Mrs. Sutherland's ample bosom heaved with excitement. Even the imperturbable Captain Vibart seemed shaken for a moment off his perch, and stood in the middle of the room wearing the dazed and unlovely expression usually attributed to the stuck pig.

Only Dr. Bennett retained his normal serenity and remained calm, with the deadly confidence of the man who knows his job, and enjoys doing it.

"I don't think he's going to give us any trouble," he remarked cheerfully. "Still perhaps the ladies had better leave us to manage him alone."

"I think I'll go too," volunteered Jack. "He doesn't seem to care about the look of me at all."

"All right," said the doctor. "I say, you might, if you don't mind, ring up No. 17008 for me, and ask them to send Watts round as soon as possible."

"Right!" said Jack. Then turning again to Amy, he held out his hand for the second time. "Good-bye, Mrs. Brown, I expect he'll be all right presently. I shouldn't worry yourself about this little outburst if I were you; when you talk it over with him you'll find it's all right. I'm afraid it's partly my fault; but of course I had no idea."

"Of course not," said Amy, rising and looking at him with bright tear-washed eyes. "It wasn't your fault at all. I think you behaved splendidly, thank you so much. Good-bye." She turned to Mrs. Sutherland, who was also ready to take her leave of this distressed household. "Good-bye, dear Mrs. Sutherland, I do hope you're not feeling too upset, would you like some brandy or something?"

"No, my dear," replied that lady, somewhat recovered from her alarming experiences, "brandy won't do a bit of good."

She took Amy's hand impressively between her own plump and well-gloved ones, and looking earnestly into her face said:

"It's Fear caused all this, Mrs. Brown. Fear on your husband's side, and Fear on ours. For a moment it mastered me; I admit it to my shame. But now I am calm, I see the Truth. Gard is All. All is Gard. Perfect Love casteth out Fear; and don't you," she added, throwing a malicious glance at the doctor, "believe all that man tells you."

Without waiting for a reply she sailed out of the room, followed by her unregenerate nephew, who



was endeavouring with little success to hide a profane grin of delight at his aunt's sudden change of tactics now that all danger was past.

"And now," said Kit to himself as the door closed behind his visitors, "I suppose I've got to have it out with Amy," and he sighed deeply.

The doctor seeing him in a more reasonable frame of mind released hold, and Amy, like the thrifty girl she was, sent the gardener back about his business, for he only came half a day a week, and time in his case was money.

The room seemed strangely silent to Kit. Amy was sitting very still, almost as though she were waiting for something else to happen. There was no doubt in her husband's mind what that something was, and he decided that if it must happen then the sooner the better. It was almost a relief to feel that in a few minutes everything would be cleared up between them. Possibly, too, Amy would not cut up very rough about it; she looked, he thought, rather pensive and forgiving, altogether in a soft and appropriate mood for receiving a confession. He wondered how much longer the doctor meant to stay, and what he would say when he knew the truth, or that small portion of it, which it might be necessary to tell him.

"I expect you're busy, doctor," he suggested at length. "You will want to get off to your work. I'm all right now," he added with an effort, "it was only that chap being here that upset me."

"I'm in no hurry," said Dr. Bennett, taking

up the morning paper. "I'm expecting a man here presently ; I want to wait and see him."

"What for?" asked Kit uneasily. "Nothing to do with me, is it?"

"Don't you worry, old chap," said the doctor, immersed in the newspaper. "Watts is quite a decent fellow; you won't find him much in your way."

Kit sat up very straight.

"Look here," he said resolutely, "I'm not going to have anyone planted here to look after me, if that's the idea."

The doctor laid down his paper and regarded his patient seriously.

"My dear Brown, you must surely realize by now that you can't stay here alone with only women in the house. What do you suppose your wife would do if you were to be taken again as you were just now? You know you're a very curious case, and I'm sure you're quite able to appreciate the gravity of your own condition."

"Certainly," said Kit practically, "I realize it all right; I'm about the only person here who does." He turned to his wife, who was gazing wistfully at him. "Amy," he asked, "did you tell the doctor a fortnight ago that I was going off my head?"

"Y . . . yes," hesitated Amy, "in a way I did. I had to, I was getting afraid."

Kit looked puzzled.

"What were you afraid of?" he asked curiously.

"Everything," replied Amy, with more con-

fidence. "The way you looked, and the things you said; going down to Brighton; getting up in the middle of the night to walk about your room. All kinds of things like that. I didn't really, Kit," she said earnestly, "say a word till it was necessary; and this last affair only shows how necessary it was."

"I see," said Kit thoughtfully. "You mean about Vibart."

"Yes," said Amy, "and losing your memory. It's time something was done, don't you think so yourself?"

"I don't know," said Kit. "I can't help thinking that every one is making an awful fuss about nothing. If I did lose my memory, that doesn't say I've gone mad. Anybody might think I was a raving lunatic the way I'm treated. As for Vibart, well, I can soon explain all that, when . . . when I have an opportunity."

He looked pointedly at the doctor.

"Sorry I'm in the way, old chap," said the doctor cheerfully, making no attempt to remove himself.

"Never mind him," said Amy; "he's one of the family by this time."

"Very well then," said Kit. "I can see he doesn't mean to leave me alone till this is cleared up." He braced himself for the plunge with a deep breath. "Tell me," he said, "what did Vibart say about me?"

He leaned forward anxiously, waiting for the worst.

Amy looked suddenly suspicious.

"He didn't say anything," she answered slowly.

"Didn't he tell you," demanded Kit, "anything about . . . well, anything?"

"No," replied Amy, wondering. "How could he? He didn't know you from Adam. He'd never seen you or heard about you before. I wish I understood what you've got into your head about him."

"Do you mean to tell me," persisted Kit, "that he came all the way here for no purpose at all? What made him come then I should like to know?"

"He came," explained Amy patiently, "with his aunt. He was on his way to see her, and she happened to meet him and brought him here before going back to their house. She wanted to leave me some books. Now do you understand?"

But Kit could not believe it yet; he felt certain that, whether Amy knew it or not, Vibart had not visited his house without some dark and sinister motive.

"Didn't he know that I lived here?" he asked. "Are you sure of that?"

"Of course," said Amy. "How could he know you lived here when he'd never heard of you?"

"He never mentioned my name, never said anything at all about me?"

Amy shook her head. "Not a word."

"What a most extraordinary thing," said Kit; "I can't believe it."

It was beginning to dawn on him that his guilty

secret was still intact : the dreaded confession could be postponed, perhaps even dispensed with altogether. He felt suddenly almost free and light-hearted, and a look of immense relief spread over his features as he realized that, after all, Amy knew nothing. He wondered how far he had compromised himself, but reflected happily that practically nothing had been said which could not with a little ingenuity be explained away.

The doctor's voice broke in upon his reverie.

"Where do you think you've met this Captain Vibart?" he inquired.

"Well, there you are," began Kit, hedging cautiously now that his rôle was changed. "I'm not quite sure where I actually met him. That is, of course, I've known him on and off for a long time. He's a fellow that's always knocking about town, with actresses and all that. In fact, he's not at all the right sort of man for my wife to know. You see what I mean?"

"But, Kit dear," interrupted Amy, "he's only been home three weeks from Nigeria. You can't have seen him knocking about town when he was in Africa, can you?"

This was rather a facer, and Kit looked very worried.

"I only know," he persisted, "what I've told you; the man's a bad lot. I don't say he's never been to Nigeria; he may have been to the North Pole for all I know—or care. I only wish," he sighed wearily, "that I'd never set eyes on him."



His weary sigh went straight to Amy's kind heart. She rose quickly and crossed over to her husband's chair.

"See here, old darling," she said, "I won't let you worry yourself any more. It really doesn't matter a bit, does it? Don't think any more about it."

She turned to the doctor.

"I won't have him bothered, doctor; no more questions to-day at any rate."

Kit took her hand gratefully; he had passed through a very trying time, and her sweet sympathy was balsam to his wounded spirit.

"Just one more then," urged the doctor, "then I'll leave him in peace. Ever heard," he asked, turning casually to Kit, "of anyone called Lebah?"

"*What!*" exclaimed Kit, dropping his wife's hand as though it had been a piece of live coal. He stared hard at the doctor and a crafty look came into his eyes.

"I see you know the name," said the doctor cheerfully. "Who is she?"

"Who is she?" echoed Kit vaguely, searching, panic-stricken, in his mind for a suitable reply to this vital question.

There was absolute silence in the room; the eyes of both Amy and the doctor were fixed upon the unhappy Kit as he tried in great anguish to think who Lebah was.

"Can't you remember?" asked Amy kindly.

Her husband grasped thankfully at this helpful straw.

"I . . . no . . . I'm afraid I can't, Amy," he said.

Amy turned to the doctor.

"Why do you ask him that?" she inquired.

"Because," said the doctor, "I took the liberty of overhauling his clothes just now when I was upstairs. They were lying on a chair, and I thought possibly they might help us. There was no sign of any struggle, or any fall: no mud or dust upon them, but in one of the pockets I found this." He held up a tiny, crumpled gauze handkerchief, marked with several small bloodstains.

Kit stared spellbound at this unexpected object.

"Any idea who it belongs to?" asked the doctor.

There was another long pause, during which Kit was uncomfortably aware of Amy's eyes fixed anxiously upon him. Apparently she had no suspicion of the incriminating nature of the doctor's find, and as Kit watched her out of the corner of his eye he decided to lie low and say nothing.

"No," he said simply, "I haven't. I didn't know it was there."

This at least was true enough, and he looked the doctor frankly in the face as he said it.

"It's marked **LEBAH** in one corner," said the doctor lightly. "You don't know anyone of that name?"

"No," persisted Kit stubbornly, "I don't; never heard of it."

"I told you," explained Amy reproachfully to the doctor, "he can't remember a thing. It's

no use bothering him, you won't make matters any better. Kit darling, wouldn't you like to go upstairs now, or will you lie down on the sofa in here ? ”

Kit looked in helpless despair round the room. The sight of Lebah's handkerchief had thoroughly unnerved him ; it seemed as though everything and everybody conspired against him for his undoing. He longed with a passionate fervour to escape from his tormentors.

“ No,” he said despondently, “ I believe I'd be better in bed—alone. I'll go upstairs.”

He rose dejectedly, and without another word walked slowly out of the room.

Amy's eyes filled with tears as she watched him go.

“ Poor darling,” she said feelingly, “ he's just beginning to realize what it all means to him.”

And she ran after him to help him into bed.

## CHAPTER XIII

IT was a very long time since Uppington had heard of anything quite so exciting as Christopher Brown's sudden outbreak of insanity, and his violent attack on Mrs. Sutherland's nephew. The struggle with Dr. Bennett and the gardener lost nothing in the telling, and Amy soon found herself one of the most important persons in the village. Friends and acquaintances dropped in at all hours to inquire after her afflicted husband : some with sympathy and helpful suggestions to offer, others with frank curiosity, and everyone with a fixed determination to miss nothing that was going on at Elm Villa. For the little Browns were behaving in a way that excited the wildest speculation in the minds of their neighbours. They were keeping everything so dark that it was most difficult to say what had really happened and what had not.

The invalid was never on view, and nobody could say with authority what he looked like. Rumour had it that his appearance was too dreadful for the public gaze, his head having been damaged beyond recognition in the mysterious catastrophe, which had overtaken him. Rumour also had it that there was

nothing at all the matter with him, and that he was hiding from his creditors to postpone as long as possible a financial crisis. Everybody agreed, however, that Amy Brown had developed an astonishing aptitude for bluff, and that her childish blue eyes were evidently not so innocent as they looked. She ought, by all the rules of the game, to have wept on the shoulders of at least half a dozen bosom friends, yet, so far as could be ascertained, not a tear had been shed. It almost seemed as though dear Mrs. Brown was a two-faced little cat who kept herself to herself in spite of her engaging manners, and Uppington was pained to think how deceived it had been in her.

Amber Martin was heard to say, that even if Kit had gone mad—which could surprise no one considering what a fool he had always been—there was no need to make a public exhibition of him ; and that, if the same fate had befallen her own husband, she would have been only too thankful to shut him up in one of the bedrooms and forget all about him. And this was taken to mean that Kit was kept a prisoner, probably in a strait-jacket, because Amber was frequently to be seen at Elm Villa and therefore must know what she was talking about. Often in the mornings she called to take the children for a walk, and if Amy confided in anyone, which was by no means certain, then Amber was undoubtedly the chosen one. Unless—and here was a prolific source of conjecture—Mrs. Sutherland was also involved in the extraordinary secrecy which surrounded the whole affair. For it was common know-



ledge that Amy had for some time professed a leaning towards Christian Science.

Mrs. Glynn-Evans could not bring herself to believe that any woman, even if she were so misguided as to refuse the advice and consolation of her friends, could be so utterly lost as to pin her faith to the absurdities of Christian Science. Experiments of that kind, she said, were all very well when you were in perfect health, and had nothing else to think about. But in the case of illness, especially of the brain, and more especially of your husband's brain, on which you relied for your daily bread, it was tempting Providence to meddle with them. As she very shrewdly pointed out, if doctors were not meant to be consulted in such cases, why were there any doctors at all? Why did the Almighty permit them if not for our help and guidance? She added that she had no patience with all these newfangled ideas, and that she felt sure that Amy Brown was much too sensible a girl to be led away by Mrs. Sutherland, who, when all was said and done, was an American from goodness knew where.

But Uppington was not quite so confident as Mrs. Glynn-Evans. It considered Amy too pretty to have much sense, and far too inexperienced to deal with a difficult problem like the present one, without the counsel and advice of older and wiser people; and the fact that she had so skilfully evaded them and their good offices seemed to indicate that some alien influence was at work. Mrs. Sutherland therefore was regarded with deep suspicion, and

expressions of sympathy were to be heard on all sides for poor Mr. Brown.

Several courageous attempts had been made to extract information from Dr. Bennett, but he was much too wary a bird to be caught napping. You could never surprise him into an admission about anybody or anything, and if you asked him a straightforward and neighbourly question he would merely smile reproachfully and begin to talk about the price of bread, these tactics being, as every one knew, not so much to cover a praiseworthy reticence as to hide the extent of his own ignorance and indecision. It was observed that he paid a visit to Elm Villa every day, but even if you waited till he came out, and popped inside the gate directly afterwards, it was quite as likely as not that you would be told Mrs. Brown was not at home. Or if you were invited inside, it was into a cold and inhospitable drawing-room when you knew perfectly well there was a fire in the dining-room; and you had to sit and listen to Amy Brown's gentle platitudes about nervous strain, and overwork, and the necessity for complete rest, till you were so exasperated that you couldn't stay any longer.

Mrs. Todhunter, who was a perfect lady with a crest, and who therefore never listened to the gossip of servants, but whose cook was cousin to the cook at Elm Villa, was recognized as the fountain-head of information. She could, however, not be induced to part with much of it, and gained her reputation more by what she thought it kinder not to say than by what she actually told people. She thus earned

the double distinction of knowing more than anyone else, and of being too kind-hearted to repeat it, and reaped a full harvest of invitations on the strength of it.

In short, the whole community was deeply interested, and on the tiptoe of expectation for further developments.

Christopher, however, was blissfully unaware of the solicitude he was exciting in the village, being exclusively concerned with his own immediate prospects, and finding much food for painful reflection therein. It was hardly a week since the fatal evening when he had evolved the brilliant but, as it had transpired, disastrous idea of losing his memory for the occasion. In that short time his circumstances had undergone a complete and almost incredible change : he had been transformed by a series of unavoidable accidents from a perfectly healthy and normal young man, with a banking account and a will of his own, into a mental invalid, guarded day and night with watchful care, never left alone for a single moment, and humoured patiently every time he opened his mouth, in a way that often drove him nearly as mad as everyone believed him to be.

Despite his most earnest endeavours, he had not so far succeeded in escaping from the network of misfortune that hedged him in on either side : try as he might, every plan was frustrated, every move anticipated by the careful Amy, and by a person named Watts whom Kit loathed with the whole force of his

being. For Watts was nothing more or less than a mental nurse, and he had been installed by direction of the doctor, who very properly had refused to leave Amy alone in the house with a husband who might at any moment break out into violence and assassinate her. And so Watts had arrived, with his small brown bag, his furtive eyes, and his stealthy tread ; and Kit, storm, threaten, entreat as he might, could not get rid of him. A small bed was made up in the spare room, and there every night snored Watts, the key under his pillow, and a box of matches by his side to be ready for emergencies. He followed his patient about like an obsequious shadow, sat in the dining-room with him at meal-times, and when on one occasion Kit resolutely put on his hat and left the house, Watts was at his heels like a sleuth-hound, till in despair he retraced his steps and went back home, where at least he could hide his humiliation from the curious eyes of his neighbours.

He soon discovered that any resistance on his part was treated as a further symptom of insanity, and a new and horrid fear assailed him. What if they should take it into their heads to drug him, put him in a cab, and deposit him in a lunatic asylum ? Such things he knew had been done before now, and he began to realize that if he showed any signs of violence there was every prospect of his waking up one morning to find his liberty gone for ever. It would no doubt be quite easy to secure another doctor to confirm the diagnosis of Dr. Bennett, a process Kit believed was necessary

before he could be legally certified insane. He had to admit to himself that it would be very difficult for him to prove himself a rationally-minded man now that things had gone so far. Even if he made up his mind to confide the whole circumstances to his wife, such was her opinion of his mental condition that she would not believe him without the confirmation of outside evidence. She would ask for Lebah's address in order to seek an interview with that lady, and Kit, as he reflected on the sort of conversation that must take place between the two women, felt his soul curl up and shrivel within him. On the whole it seemed that, trying as his present circumstances were, a full confession would not tend to make them much less so. Supposing that he succeeded in establishing his sanity beyond doubt, he realized that he would look such a scoundrel in Amy's eyes and such a fool in those of other people, particularly in those of Lebah and the doctor, that he would almost prefer to be considered a mild sort of lunatic, especially if he were also that sort who got better very quickly and never had a return of his malady.

He therefore decided to lie low and say nothing ; to be very amenable and obliging, very sane and ordinary, so that in a short time everybody would see how completely he had recovered. But it was not easy to be sane and ordinary when everything was as exasperating as it could possibly be : when Amy was so kind and forbearing that he longed to box her ears ; when the children were kept away from him lest he should turn and rend them ;



and when he could not move out of the house, nor even move inside it, without the hateful Watts behind him. On one point he was firm. He would see nobody, and nobody was to see him. He knew from long experience of Uppington what to expect if once his neighbours got wind of his condition, and he did not intend to give them a chance to gossip about him. He believed that the whole thing would soon blow over when he was able to get about again, especially if Amy spoke of it, as she had promised him she would, as a temporary nervous breakdown due to overwork.

And so in noble endeavour to make the best of things, the days passed quickly and not unhappily, for Kit reminded himself that, although his brain was quite sound, his nerves were a good deal shaken by his recent experiences and would be all the better for a complete rest. He also felt that he had a lot to make up for in the way of nourishment, and industriously absorbed four square meals a day, with cups of beef-tea and beaten egg between whiles, to get back his lost strength and vigour. He quite looked forward to the doctor's visits as a pleasant break in the monotony of the day, and began to take an active and intelligent interest in his various symptoms, ably assisted by Watts, who was a man of much experience in mental cases and knew exactly what to expect.

He soon discovered that, although he had always supposed himself to be fairly healthy and sound, there were many indications of disease in his system; many trifles of which he had previously taken no

notice, but which in the light of his newly acquired knowledge became quite weighty straws to show which way the wind was blowing. As, for instance, on a certain occasion when the doctor had startled him by a request that he would take off his shoes and stockings.

"What for?" asked Kit bluntly, as the nimble Watts was already unfastening his shoes with the deftness of long practice.

"Put 'em up," said the doctor. "I want to see whether you're ticklish or not."

"No, I'm not," said Kit proudly, "never was."

The doctor passed his fingers gently over the outstretched soles, watching anxiously for any signs of twitching or muscular disturbance; but Kit, who had often played that game at school, maintained a stoic demeanour and never so much as moved a muscle.

"Ah," sighed the doctor, when his most subtle and persuasive tickling had produced no effect, "I was afraid so. Put 'em on again, Watts."

"What's the matter?" asked Kit anxiously. "Ought I to be ticklish?"

"Course you should," replied the doctor cheerfully. "However, it's only what I expected."

"As a matter of fact," explained Kit, "I did feel something, or other. Not much, you know, but still."

"All right, old chap," said the doctor, "better luck next time."

And Kit perceived that if he had squirmed

naturally instead of making a boast of his fortitude, he would have come better out of this strange ordeal. But it was too late, for the doctor refused to try again.

These and similar experiments made Kit sometimes wonder whether he was quite as sane as he had hitherto believed. He felt, now that he thought about it, rather woolly and lethargic, especially after meal-times, and it occurred to him that his fall against Lebah's fender, following on a period of mental strain, might easily have damaged something inside his head. It therefore behoved him to take every care of himself, for, although he knew that he was saner than the doctor believed him to be, there was no doubt the worthy man had a good deal of evidence to justify him in his opinion.

He often wished that he knew the meaning of Vibart's mysterious visit to the house, for he felt sure that it was not unpremeditated, and that, if Mrs. Sutherland was not in the secret, she had been the innocent tool of her nephew. He was convinced that Amy did not know the whole story, but from occasional remarks that she made he often feared that she had a suspicion of his guilt and the thought always made him very uneasy. Sometimes he almost decided to tell her everything, but it was a great deal easier to make the resolution than to carry it out. In the first place, Watts was nearly always with him, and any hint that he should betake himself elsewhere was either ignored or flatly rejected. It seemed,

in fact, to make Watts suspicious if Kit tried to manœuvre a *tête-à-tête* with his wife, and Amy herself was not in the least helpful. On the few occasions when a brief opportunity had presented itself, Kit had found himself totally unprepared for it, and the auspicious moment had fled before he could make up his mind to grasp it.

One could not, of course, rush at a confession of that sort. It was necessary to lead up to it with tact in order to present the incident in the most favourable light. It seemed to Kit that what Amy knew or did not know was the crux of the whole question ; for, if she knew anything at all, it would perhaps be better to tell her the rest and put an end to the present unsatisfactory state of affairs ; and if she knew nothing, it seemed a pity, having gone so far, not to try and wriggle through with an untarnished reputation. It was a very difficult problem, and Kit considered it often and anxiously from all points of view, without being able to come to a decision.

But the days were passing, and he felt it was time to make a move in one direction or another, and so one afternoon when Watts had gone out of the room for a few minutes he took his courage in both hands and approaching the subject with caution he remarked pathetically to his wife :

"Amy darling, I'm getting so fed up with all this."

"I know you must be, poor dear," replied Amy sympathetically.

"I can't help thinking," said Kit, "that you might help me a little more than you do."

Amy stared at him.

"But, Kit!" she exclaimed, "I do everything that I possibly can, I'm always trying to help you, what more can I do?"

"It seems to me," said Kit, "that you listen too much to what people say. You must know, as well as I do, that there's not much wrong with me; nothing at all, in fact, except for that accident, or whatever it was. And yet you have the doctor here every day, and that Watts fellow. Anybody might think that I'd gone clean off my chump. I must say I don't think it's very kind of you, you wouldn't like it if you were in my place."

Amy looked distressed.

"You see," she said, "it's rather difficult for me, Kit dear. We can only be guided by what the doctor says, and he thinks that, while there's any chance of your losing your memory again, some one ought to be always with you. I know how awful it must be for you, darling boy. Don't you think it would be better if you were to go out more and see people?"

"With Watts in attendance? No thank you. Not much. But how long do you expect this sort of thing is going to last? When does the doctor think I shall be all right again? I shall have to go back to the office, you know, or I shall get the sack."

"Kit dear," said Amy gravely, "don't think about the office. You won't be able to go back



for a long time—if ever. I wrote to them about you the other day.”

“You shouldn’t have done that,” said Kit anxiously. “What did you say?”

“I told them,” said Amy, “that you had a sort of nervous breakdown and the doctor insisted on a rest for a time.”

“Well, but, you know,” said Kit, “I can’t afford to knock off work; besides there’s no reason why I should, that I can see.”

“Just for a little while,” coaxed Amy, “till we see how you go on. I had a letter from your father this morning; he says we are not to worry about money, he will see that we have all we want. He’s coming up to town as soon as he can get away, and he says if you’re not better by then he will take you to a good specialist he knows of, and see if you ought to undergo a proper treatment.”

Amy’s words struck a cold chill into her husband’s heart. Things were even worse than he had imagined. There was no time to be lost in putting them in order before they went too far.

“Look here, Amy,” he faltered, “I’ve . . . I’ve got something to tell you. You see. . . . Well . . . you do believe, don’t you, that I’m very fond of you?” He rose, and in his agitation began to pace up and down the room. “I swear, Amy, I’ve *never* loved any woman but you, whatever anybody may say, I’ve never *really* cared a straw about anyone else.”

“I know you love me, Kitty darling,” said Amy sweetly, “I’ve never doubted it.”

"Yes, I do, Amy," cried her husband earnestly. "If you only knew the agony of mind I've been through: the haunting remorse night and day; the fear that you would misunderstand me—that was the most terrible thought."

Amy rose too, and laid her hand kindly on her husband's shoulder.

"I quite understand what you feel, dear boy," she said. "Don't worry about it, duckie; don't excite yourself, it's so bad for you."

He seized her hand and pressed it nervously between his own.

"No, I won't," he said, "but you do realize, don't you, that it was all a mistake, the whole thing, a huge mistake? Of course Vibart coming in when he did was really what caused it all."

"Yes," said Amy patiently, "it was very tiresome for you, but don't bother about it now."

Kit looked hard at her.

"I knew he'd told you," he remarked significantly.

"Told me what?" asked Amy.

"About . . ." it was difficult to say, but he stuck to it courageously, "about . . . Lebah."

At last it was out.

Amy looked puzzled.

"I don't understand what you mean," she said. "What had he to do with the handkerchief, or with the owner of it?"

"Well, he was there, of course," said Kit.

"Where—the night you had the accident?"

"Of course," said Kit, "he knocked me down. I suppose he took care not to tell you that?"

Amy could not repress a smile at this absurdity.

"Don't be silly, darling," she said good-naturedly. "I'm sure Captain Vibart wouldn't knock you down. Besides, anybody could see, when you walked into the room the other morning, that you were a perfect stranger to him. Why on earth should he pretend he didn't know you? He was quite taken by surprise at the way you went on, poor young man. But I wonder," she continued thoughtfully, "if somebody really did knock you down, somebody perhaps rather like Captain Vibart. Perhaps your memory is beginning to come back to you. Try and think, darling."

But at this moment Watts entered the room, and Kit did not feel equal to remembering any more. He relapsed into a dejected silence and refused to speak another word.

It was quite evident to him now that Amy knew nothing, and while on the one hand this was a great relief to his mind, on the other it added considerably to his difficulties. He could see that it would take a great deal to convince her of the truth of his story—nothing less, in fact, than a complete exposure of the whole proceedings, and he felt that rather than that should happen he would suffer in silence for the rest of his life.

He did not, however, think it would ever come to that, something would no doubt turn up before long to deliver him, so he held his peace and waited with all the patience he could muster for further developments.

But the end was not yet.

## CHAPTER XIV

WITH so much doing in Uppington, we fear Lebah has been rather neglected. But we cannot be in two places at once, and, moreover, when a girl behaves with such culpable carelessness as to lose two devoted lovers in the short period of half an hour or so, she is better left alone till the edge wears off her disappointment. Christopher Brown she could very well dispense with, and indeed was heartily glad to see the last of him ; but the case of Jack Vibart was a totally different one. She knew, none better, the rage and bitterness that filled his heart as he helped his rival down the stone stairs, and her own heart ached with sympathy for his wounded feelings. She waited till the last echo died down in the silent building, and even a little longer, in case he should relent and return to her ; but she did not expect him, and presently she closed the door and went back into the little sitting-room.

There she stood for quite a long time in the exact spot where she had seen him, with brown eager hands outstretched towards her, and a look in his green eyes that told her everything she wanted to know. She could feel again the pressure of

his lean arms and the nervous tremor of his breathing as he drew her to him ; and her whole being yearned for him with an intensity which charmed as much as it surprised her. She was in love at last ! So delighted was she with this sweet revelation of her feelings, that she hardly realized the possibility of Jack being offended beyond recall. She felt so strong and so uplifted that she scarcely paused to think of Jack at all. It was enough that she loved him, that her whole nature was flooded with this divine inspiration. For the time being he was only the magic key to unlock the gates of heaven for her, and she was much more concerned with what she found there than with the man who had been the means of transporting her thither.

It was some hours later, when she lay on her small bed, with sleep afar off, that she began to think of him as a man, her own man, and to make plans for their future. For that they had a future, in spite of the present *impasse*, she never doubted for a moment. She was more than ever determined to marry him, not, now that she loved him, so much for her own advancement as for his welfare. He needed her, so she told herself, not as a passing amusement, but to complete his life, to give him the love and comfort that only a wife can give. She almost lost sight of his money and his position as she thought of him, lonely and homeless in strange lands, dependent on the careless ministrations of black servants, or wandering about the Promenade at Brighton in search of a congenial spirit to keep



him company—either condition in her mind being equally desolate. She began in a woman's extraordinary way to be sorry for him, to long to pet and take care of him, oblivious in her enthusiasm of the fact that if any man in the world knew how to take care of himself, it was Jack Vibart. And so she lay all that happy night in a fool's paradise, dreaming the Love Dream, which is so much more satisfying than the Reality, and building castles in the air with the slender fabric of her hopes.

Jack, as we know, was quite otherwise employed that night. He could not look into the future with Lebah's far-seeing eye, and was in a cold fury at the indignities of the present. Even if he had been blessed with prophetic vision, it is doubtful if the prospect would have pleased him as it pleased her, for the one thing he detested above all others was the thought of marriage. He looked upon it as a calamity of the greatest magnitude, a sort of moral suicide, a living death ; he had no words to express his opinion of an able-bodied young man who allowed himself to be tied up in the bonds of matrimony. Women might marry and indeed ought to do so, or they were no good to themselves or to anyone else ; and there were plenty of old men, and men with positions to consider and inheritances to hand down to posterity, whose duty it was to marry them. But he often thanked heaven that no such dire necessity confronted him, and that there was no need for him to sacrifice himself either to the past or to the future.

It was in pursuance of this ideal of single blessedness—although he was guided more by instinct than by any process of reasoning—that he decided, on the day following his visit to Uppington, to send a wire to old Mackenzie, to whose house he had a standing invitation, asking if he could put him up for a few days. And when Mackenzie wired back, "Certainly come whenever you like and stay as long as you can," he packed a kit bag without further delay into his new motor-car and set off to do the journey by road.

He was glad to think that this masterly stroke precluded the possibility of his meeting Lebah again ; but he had to try very hard to be glad, for his heart, in spite of himself, was longing to see her. He could not get her out of his mind. She seemed to linger in its more secret recesses and to pop out when he least expected her to. He was still angry with her, but he could not help feeling sometimes how nice it would be to forgive her ; and, when he reflected on the way she had treated him, he did not think he had very much to forgive. She had undoubtedly admitted Brown by a mistake, and hidden him in a moment of foolish panic. He liked to dwell on her confusion and nervousness : she was very enchanting like that, and he wondered all the things a man does wonder about the woman he wants for his own ; and then pulled himself up with a round turn, and thought resolutely about something else.

Now Jack knew quite enough to distrust these conflicting emotions profoundly. He realized

quite plainly, before he had been two days away from London, that, as he expressed it, he had "got it in the neck," and the knowledge made him very restive. He felt very uneasy and insecure. On the one hand, he wanted to fly back to town, and, on the other hand, he was afraid to go because of what might happen when he got there.

One hears a great deal about the timorous heart-searchings of the maiden who stands hovering on the brink of Love, wondering in her innocent soul if she dare set her foot in those perilous waters ; but her qualms are nothing to the trepidation of the young man who finds himself in the same plight. Indeed, the two can hardly be compared at all. Because, whereas the maiden, from about the age of three years, knows exactly what she wants and how to go about getting it, the man, taught from infancy to use his brains rather than his intuitions, generally finds the ground gone from under his feet before he is aware of any danger. His brains are of no use to him in his sudden dilemma, he quickly loses his balance, and with it his dignity ; and bereft of his two most cherished possessions cuts a sorry figure indeed. But the maiden, if she is a nice girl, will comfort him with soft words. She will talk to him of his strength of character, his virility, and of his superb intellect, and he will believe everything she likes to tell him in that line, and feel all the better for it.

Jack, however, was still in the floundering and indeterminate stage. He felt the ground giving way beneath his feet, and as yet saw no out-

stretched hand to save him, heard no comforting words for his consolation.

And if anybody thinks that an experienced man of thirty-five is not likely to lose his head over such a simple matter, he is quite wrong—we say he, because she knows better—it is a phenomenon to be seen every day of the week by those who have eyes to see. A man can be as big a fool at thirty as he can be at twenty, or for that matter at sixty. With this difference, that at twenty he doesn't know that he is a fool—he thinks he is a god, and enjoys the experience. At sixty he knows well enough what he is, and thanks his stars that he has yet another chance before going down to the grave. But at thirty-five, he has neither the illusions of youth nor the consolations of age: he is young enough to feel foolish and old enough to know better—which is precisely what Jack Vibart reminded himself when he contemplated the prospect of falling in love. At any rate, he reflected, he knew enough to remain where he was, and not to run the risk of going back to town just yet.

And so the days passed, and Lebah waited in vain for the sound of his familiar knock at her front door.

The rapture that she had experienced on finding herself in love soon lost its pristine freshness, especially when she discovered that Jack had gone away and left her without a word. For two whole days she expected him at any and every moment, and lived in an atmosphere of delicious anticipation. But, when on the third day he had not put in an

appearance, doubts began to gather in her mind, and she called at his hotel, not to see him—that would have been much too obvious for Lebah—but merely to inquire if he were still there.

The hotel clerk thought not, and on looking through his books was able to confirm this conjecture. Captain Vibart had left on Thursday. No, he did not know where he had gone, and his expression denoted that even if he had known he would not have said so. Any letters sent to the hotel would be forwarded to his bank, the address of which he had left behind him. He did not know whether Captain Vibart intended returning to the hotel, if he had gone abroad, or whether he was still in England. He had no information whatever as to Captain Vibart's movements, and apparently only a very poor opinion of ladies who wanted to know too much.

When Lebah heard this bad news, her spirit groaned within her, and she wended her way home again to commune with herself over a cup of tea. Very incensed she was against Jack; furious with him for nipping off like that, and smarting under the humiliation that he had laid upon her. She felt that he had practically jilted her; for, if the question had not been exactly put into words, at any rate his eyes had hidden nothing of their meaning. And yet he had gone off without so much as waiting to hear whether she said yes or no. He had asked for her love and thrown it back carelessly in her face, than which there is no more heinous crime in a woman's calendar. When she thought how ready



she had been to give it to him, she ground her teeth in impotent rage and hated him mightily, for in proportion as one loves, so, if the tables are turned, does one hate, and she had loved him very much only the day before.

But when she had finished her tea, and smoked six cigarettes one after another, the violence of her fury began to abate, and she felt more able to take a calm and dispassionate view of the situation. She was not one of those poor-spirited girls who droop under adversity ; neither did her pride prompt her to cast Jack out of her life and banish him from her thoughts. On the contrary, she girded up her loins and set to work to think how best she could get him back again ; for, if before she had proposed to marry him, she was now fully determined to do so. On careful consideration she perceived that the fact of his having fled so precipitately from town was a good omen. It showed, in the first place, that he had taken her behaviour very seriously to heart ; secondly, that he had been angry enough to wish to hurt her—a sure sign of affection—and thirdly, that he was afraid of her influence. Why, unless he had felt these things, should he have suddenly upset all his plans and arrangements, and gone off, nobody knew where, for no apparent reason at all ? She could almost smile to herself when she pictured his savage satisfaction at the chastisement he had dealt her : his triumph at having cut with his own hands the cords that were binding him. In fact, she did smile, because she knew that he would feel the punishment a great deal more than she intended

to, and that the cords were still as good and strong as ever.

So convinced was she of this, that she told herself there was no need for her to be in an unseemly hurry to run after him, a proceeding for which she had the greatest contempt, and one to which she would only resort when everything else had failed. Moreover, she very rightly argued that a man on the end of a piece of string is more likely to return to the girl who holds the other end of it, if she doesn't pull it and annoy him. It is possible that in a tug of war she might get the worst of it, or the string might break ; and Lebah was taking no unnecessary risks. She therefore decided to wait a full week before taking any steps whatever.

The week, however, was hardly more than half-way through, when her plans received an impetus from a very unexpected quarter.

She was sitting one afternoon in her long chair by the fire reading a French novel, lurid without and innocuous within as French novels so often are, when the door opened, and Bertha, ushered in by old Doody, entered the room.

"Hullo, B.," said Lebah, skimming hastily down to the end of the paragraph. "How's things?"

Bertha unfolded a newspaper. Her eyes were full of mysterious excitement.

"I've got something to show you," she said. "What was the name of that feller who used to come here such a lot a few weeks back, was it Brown?"

"He seemed to think it was," replied Lebah lazily, shutting up her book and preparing to take an intelligent interest in Bertha's communication.

"Very well, then," proceeded Bertha, "listen here.

"£20 REWARD. — WANTED the owner of a handkerchief marked LEBAH, which was found in the pocket of a gentleman who had an accident on the night of October 18th. The above sum will be paid to Owner, or to any person giving a full and reliable account of the aforesaid proceedings. Apply Mrs. Brown, Elm Villa, Uppington.'

"Queer, ain't it?" remarked Bertha with a grin.

Lebah stared for a moment at her friend; then, taking the paper into her own hands, she read the advertisement over again with a furrowed brow.

"Good Lord!" she ejaculated, "found in his pocket. Was he killed, then, I wonder?"

"Looks like it," replied Bertha cheerfully. "What was he doing with your handkerchief in his pocket?"

"I lent it to him," said Lebah. "I suppose he forgot to give it back."

"It's not like you to be so careless," said Bertha candidly. "Evidently Mrs. Brown is on your track. I can see you run in for murder if you don't watch it."

"Oh, dry up!" said Lebah impatiently. "I want to think. What on earth can have happened to him?"

"Was he here on the eighteenth—that would be a week yesterday?"

"Tuesday, yes, he came in after the theatre."

"And was he all right when he left?"

"Yes . . . that is, no," hesitated Lebah. "Not exactly. He was . . . well, I don't know if he was drunk, or perhaps he was hurt more than was thought."

"Bless the girl!" exclaimed Bertha, looking at Lebah with frank curiosity. "What on earth had you been doing to him? Who's 'we'?"

"Vibart was here too," admitted Lebah, "and they had a sort of a scrap, and Kit fell and hit his head on the fender. Then Jack gave him too much brandy and he lay down on the sofa and refused to move. So he lost the last train home. And I was so fed up with the whole thing, that I fired 'em both out. What happened after they got outside heaven alone knows. Something evidently."

"Well, anyhow, it's nothing to do with you, is it? Nobody can say it's your fault, you've got Vibart as a witness that he left here all right—and after all, twenty pounds is twenty pounds. Only don't forget, old dear, that I saw it first, we'll go halves."

Lebah frowned. "I don't much fancy going to Uppington and facing Mrs. Brown," she muttered.

"Do it through a solicitor," suggested Bertha practically. "There's little Tommy Henderson

would be glad of a job, and I don't suppose he'd charge you much."

"I can't do anything," said Lebah firmly, "till I hear what Jack's got to say about it. You see they rather hated each other, perhaps after they left here they fought it out in the street. Jack's a pretty hard case when he's roused, and I shouldn't like to get him into any trouble."

Bertha's face fell.

"Blow!" she said, "that's a pity. I thought I'd struck a gold mine. Ten pounds would have been a godsend on tour next week. However, I suppose it can't be helped. Where is Vibart now? Can't you get hold of him right away?"

"No," said Lebah, "I can't, he's in the country. But I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll write to him to-night. And look here, B., I can lend you a couple of quid if you're hard up. But mind, *only* if you promise not to say a word to anyone about the ad. Keep it dark, there's a dear; it might get me into an awful hole if everything came out."

"Right you are," replied Bertha. "But, if it was me, I'd make a clean breast of the whole thing, whatever it is, before you're found out. It doesn't matter how innocent you are, you won't look it, dear old thing, if you wait till the police come and ferret it all out, to say nothing of being ten pounds out of pocket, and me too."

To Lebah this was an entirely new aspect of the affair, and not at all a pleasing one.

"I don't suppose for a minute it's a police court case," she said doubtfully.



"There's evidently some mystery about it," said Bertha, "or they wouldn't be offering twenty pounds to know what happened. If there's been an inquest you may be sure there'll be an inquiry, and sooner or later you'll have the police here. If you take my advice you'll put yourself on the right side of the fence before it's too late."

"On the other hand," argued Lebah, "it's rather like looking for trouble to show up till I know something more about it. Do you see, if by any chance his brain was injured by that fall and he died on the way home, I don't feel like explaining to anyone that Jack Vibart knocked him down in my flat at twelve o'clock at night. However," she added, "I'll see what Jack's got to say."

It took Lebah a very long time that evening to write a very short letter. There was so much that she did not want to say. But when after spoiling several sheets of paper she got it at last to her liking, it presented just that appearance of a hastily written scrawl, which she desired it to.

"DEAR JACK" (it ran)

"Please let me know what I ought to do about the enclosed ad. I suppose the handkerchief is mine, but no need to say so unless you like. What did you do with B. when you took him away from here? At any rate it looks as though he was past explaining the aforesaid proceedings to anyone. I don't want to be mixed up in an inquest any more than I expect you do. You'd better come along at once and

see what is to be done : Bertha is on the track of the £20.

Yours more or less,

LEBAH."

Lebah smiled to herself as she slipped this innocent effusion into a pillar-box on her way to the theatre. She wondered how long it would be before it reached Jack and whether it would have the desired effect. To Kit and his adventures she hardly gave a thought. It was annoying perhaps to be involved in them, but she had no doubt that even if he were dead she could quite easily clear herself of any complicity and manage to escape without much damage to her reputation ; and, whatever the inconveniences of her position, she was prepared to suffer gladly anything that gave her such an excellent excuse for writing to Jack.

## CHAPTER XV

WEDNESDAY was Kit's unlucky day. Somehow or other things always went wrong on a Wednesday, just as they always went right on a Thursday. It was a long-established conviction of his that all his troubles, great and small, eventuated on that day, so that he was not at all surprised to be awakened by a clatter of milk-cans at six a.m. But, none the less, it annoyed him very much because he had expressly said, times without number, that no milk-cans were ever to clatter outside his house at that hour of the morning. The milkman had been told more than once that if he did it again the custom of Elm Villa would be taken from him and transferred to his rival farther up the High Street; and that made him very careful, as a rule, not to bang them furiously together as he did before the houses of less fastidious people.

Kit, as he heard the noisy little cart being trundled away, determined that Amy should go that very day and put into execution the horrid threat, which had so long been held over the milkman's head. It was fully an hour before his morning tea could be expected, and he knew perfectly well

he could not go to sleep again. However, he was wrong, for ten minutes later he was off again as sound as a top into the sort of heavy, unrefreshing sleep that so often follows an early awakening. And, moreover, he dreamed a lurid dream, in which he lay half smothered on the ground with Vibart sitting on his chest and the doctor doing something with a knife, while Amy stood looking on and smiling in a polite and cheerful way, which made everything ever so much worse to bear.

He was still struggling violently in the throes of this tragedy when somebody said: "Your tea, sir," and he awoke for the second time to find the figure of the faithful Watts standing by his bedside, holding in his hand a steaming and fragrant cup of Ripton's Best. Watts in a cheap and gaudy dressing-gown was a far from inspiring sight the first thing in the morning, and one that never failed to arouse feelings of active dislike in his patient's mind, yet Kit realized that it would be unreasonable to expect the man to sleep in his clothes so that he might present a neat and attractive appearance directly he got out of bed. He therefore suffered him in silence, as indeed he was learning to suffer most things in these distressful days, for he found that almost everything he said was used as evidence against him: his most innocent remarks were twisted somehow to mean something that he had no intention of saying, and he was beginning to realize that the less he said the better. He had now been under supervision for over a week, and he was getting very tired of pitying eyes and kind

humouring tones ; and bored, terribly bored, with Watts. He had to admit, however, that poor Watts did his best ; he was an admirable nurse, willing and obliging, and the soul of good temper under conditions which were exceedingly trying for everybody concerned.

While Kit was drinking his tea Amy came into the room with a bright " Good morning," and seated herself on the edge of the bed. Whereupon Watts very unostentatiously slipped away to another apartment to dress himself and perform his toilet ; and not till he returned did Mrs. Brown cease from her intelligent remarks about the weather, or her endless stream of solicitous inquiry as to how her husband had slept, and what he was feeling like.

These manoeuvres were not by any means lost on Kit, but protest had long ago proved useless, and he bore them with a sullen resignation till such time as he should see a way clear to assert himself with any chance of success. The doctor had advised that breakfast should be taken in bed in order to give the patient as much rest as possible, and avoid the possibility of his overtiring himself during the day, and this part of the programme met with Kit's full approval, since it had always been, as long as he could remember, an effort to get up in the morning.

After breakfast he generally read the morning paper for an hour or so, until the process of digestion was sufficiently advanced to allow him to rise and have his warm bath. By that time the water in the bathroom was nice and hot, a great improve-



ment on the tepid and scanty allowance with which he often had to be contented under ordinary circumstances. His bath and the operations of shaving and dressing occupied another hour, so that it was always eleven o'clock before he was ready to descend to the dining-room where his mid-morning cup of beef-tea awaited him. It will be seen therefore that he was not making any very strenuous demands on his constitution ; and, if sometimes his spirit chafed at the enforced inaction, he comforted himself with the reflection that he was taking a much-needed rest and fortifying himself against the day, which he hoped was not very far distant, when he should be able to return and take his place in the outside world again.

It was while sipping his beef-tea that, glancing once more at the daily paper, he received a shock, the magnitude of which nearly stunned him, and quite for the moment bereft him of the power of speech. For happening to look casually down the columns of personal advertisements his roving eye caught sight of the fatal word **LEBAH**, in large letters. With a wildly beating heart he read the paragraph from the beginning :

“ £20 REWARD.—WANTED the owner of a handkerchief marked **LEBAH**, which was found in the pocket of a gentleman who had an accident on the night of October 18th. The above sum will be paid to Owner, or to any person giving a full and reliable account of the aforesaid proceedings. Apply Mrs. Brown, Elm Villa, Uppington.”

The blood rushed to his head, and he bounded out of his chair with the paper clenched in his hand.

"I say, Watts!" he cried. "Have you seen this? Whatever on earth does it mean?"

"Beg pardon, sir," said Watts, rising from his humble seat by the window.

"This advertisement . . . ab . . . b . . . bout that handkerchief," stammered Kit. "Who put it in the paper?"

Watts was discretion itself.

"Could I have a look at it, sir?" he asked with composure.

Kit handed him the noxious words and watched him with impatience while he read them.

"Who put it in?" he demanded again, as Watts laid the paper down on the table.

"To the best of my belief, sir," said Watts in measured tones, "it was the doctor's idea, that was."

"Confound him!" cried Kit angrily, "why can't he leave me alone? What on earth has it got to do with him? Why can't he mind his own business, I should like to know?"

"Yes, sir," replied Watts respectfully, "but I expect he reckons this is his own business. So far as I understand it, he wanted to find out if possible what caused the bruise on your head; and whether you lost your memory before you had the blow, or if the blow was what caused the loss of memory. You see, sir, if I may say so, you're not what I call an ordinary case: wot I mean—

you have your moments when you are as sane as wot I am myself."

"Indeed!" said Kit with bitter sarcasm, "you don't say so."

Watts smiled encouragingly.

"Oh yes, sir, and the doctor, he says that if he was to know exactly what sort of a blow you had, and how you got it, he should be better able to judge the case; he says it's a most difficult one to diagnose."

"I daresay it is," snapped Kit, "it's a great deal more complicated than he knows. Especially now. And I don't mind telling you, Watts, that this puts me in the devil of a fix. I don't know, I'm sure, what's going to be the end of it," he added dejectedly. "I've had about enough of it, I can tell you."

"I shouldn't let it upset you if I was you, sir," urged Watts soothingly. "If I'd 'a known it was to be in that paper I'd 'a kept it out of your way. The doctor warned me very special that you was not to be excited in any way whatsoever."

"I can't help being upset," said Kit dismally. "You know this is a very serious thing for me, besides making me look such a fool."

"Indeed, sir," began Watts again, "but I shouldn't . . ."

"Very serious indeed," repeated Kit. "Do you realize that at any moment the owner of that handkerchief may walk into this room and . . . and . . . compromise me . . . most . . . most extraordinarily?"

"Don't you worry about that, sir," Watts assured him, "there won't anyone walk into this room without they're let in, I'll see to that."

Almost as he spoke voices were heard in the hall; Amy had gone out to do the morning shopping, and some one was evidently having an argument with Mabel on the doorstep.

"Who's that?" asked Kit in alarm.

"Should I just see, sir?"

"No . . . no. Yes . . . you'd better," said Kit distractedly, "and if it's anybody . . . about . . . about that advertisement, show her . . . show them in here. Mrs. Brown's still out, isn't she?"

"I believe so, sir," replied Watts, disappearing through the doorway.

Kit waited anxiously for a few moments while a whispered consultation took place in the hall.

"It's Mrs. Sutherland, sir," said Watts, putting his head in at the door, "she says would you just see her for a few minutes?"

Kit heaved a sudden sigh of relief.

"Very well," he said faintly, "let her come in."

A moment later the lady, triumphant at having at last forced her way through portals so stringently denied her, entered the room, her large and expansive smile radiating before her.

"Dear Mr. Brown," she cried joyously, "I've been wanting to see you ever such a long time, but your naughty little wife wouldn't let me."

Kit shook hands with a palpably forced smile and

subsided again into his chair as Watts attentively drew up one for his visitor.

"Waal naow," she began at once, "I don't believe in beating about the bush: when I've got anything to say I jest rip it out right away without wasting any time."

"Quite," agreed Kit politely, wondering in his own mind what was coming.

"Vurry well, then. I want to say to you, Mr. Brown, that you're making jest the biggest mistake you ever made in *your* life. You're no more mad than I am, do you hear that?"

Kit looked at her in instant suspicion, his thoughts flew to Vibart.

"How do you know that?" he asked darkly.

"How do I know it?" repeated Mrs. Sutherland briskly. "Common sense, that's how. C.S. Common Sense. C.S. Christian Science. See that? Cute, an't it?"

Kit smiled uncertainly and said nothing, having no idea at all what to say.

"Besides," continued Mrs. Sutherland, who much preferred to do the talking herself, "I happen to know that there's no such thing as madness. It's only a delusion, an error of Mortal Mind. You may think you're mad, but once you can get rid of that idea, once you grasp the right belief, why there, you're cured right away."

"As a matter of fact," replied Kit bluntly, "I don't think I'm mad at all: it's other people who think it. I know perfectly well that I'm all right."



This was not what Mrs. Sutherland had expected, but she was far too experienced an old campaigner to show any signs of discomfiture.

"Vurry well, then," she said readily, "you must gradually impress your belief on other people, so that they will see how wrong they are in their opinion."

This seemed to Kit a very sound programme, and he grew almost interested.

"That's exactly what I have been trying to do all along," he said, "but it's not much good up to the present. Just because I lost my memory for a few hours, they have all got it into their heads that I am going out of my mind; and, if I try to assert myself, they think I'm getting dangerous. I tell you I'm afraid to say a word, in case they clap me into a lunatic asylum."

"Now jest you see here," began Mrs. Sutherland with enthusiasm. "You've been going the wrong way to work. You're holding the thought of Fear all the time. First of all Fear about your health, Fear of what the consequences might be, and now Fear of what your friends may do to you. There's only one way to fight Fear, and that is with the *Truth*. It's Truth, and nothing but Truth that will cure you, and all those around you, because to my way of thinking they're quite as sick as you are yourself."

Kit's suspicions were up in arms at once. He was rather inclined to like Mrs. Sutherland and her breezy, exhilarating conversation, but evidently there was more than met the eye in her friendly

concern about his health. This talk about the Truth made him nervous :

" Yes, but, you see," he demurred anxiously, " it all depends on what you call the truth. I mean you can't believe all you hear, you know. Supposing a man comes and tells you a story . . . about . . . say about me . . . it may be very far from true ; in fact it's quite likely that the whole thing is a pack of lies ; you see what I mean . . . ? "

Mrs. Sutherland looked puzzled, but not for long ; she was only relieved to find that Kit was no worse, and was enchanted at the undoubted impression that her gospel had already made upon him.

" See here," she said earnestly. " Truth is Gard, and Gard is All. Sin and suffering are not real, any more than darkness is real. Now darkness is *vurry* real to a man in a dark room, but you take a light into that room and where is the darkness ? Why, nowhere ! It's exactly the same thing with sin and suffering. Once let the light of Truth shine upon them, and they disappear. An't that clear to you ? "

" Yes . . . s . . . " said Kit doubtfully, " I dare-say. I don't say truth isn't a good thing in its way, but, what I mean, there are some truths which do more harm than good, if you understand me."

" Don't you think it, young man," said Mrs. Sutherland brightly, " there's nothing can harm you except yourself, and your own thots. If you see the Truth and you won't admit it, that's what

is going to harm you—your own evil thots, not divine Truth.”

Kit sighed despondently.

“I daresay you’re right,” he said. “I never pretended to be a saint. I know in a way I’ve only got myself to blame, but that doesn’t make it any easier, does it? I don’t fancy Christian Science would do me much good; not now, that is.”

“Waal, try it and see,” urged Mrs. Sutherland. “If I send you a little book, will you read it? Jest take it quietly by yourself and read carefully the parts I’ll mark for you, and in a few days I’ll look in again and see you and we’ll have another talk about it. Will you do that, dear Mr. Brown, jest to please me?”

“Yes . . . s, I will if you like,” replied Kit politely, “but I’m afraid I’m not much good at religion, never was.”

“Don’t be afraid,” said Mrs. Sutherland hopefully, “remember the harm that Fear has done you already. Why, every time the doctor comes into this house, he brings a fresh dose of Fear with him! Jest you try and forget all you’ve been told about yourself, and get your thots on what a lot of good C.S. is going to do you. You mark my words, it won’t be long before you’re laughing at yourself for ever having been in the state you’re now in.”

She rose and, taking Kit earnestly by the hand, looked straight into his eyes with her magnetic, compelling gaze:

“You’re Gard’s child,” she said impressively.

"No harm can come to you. Seek the Truth, and proclaim it boldly, and you will find all your doubts and fears, all your unhappiness, all your difficulties, roll away from you like clouds when the sun comes out. Are you going to promise me that you'll give it a trial?"

Kit blinked under the powerful searchlight of her penetrating eyes.

"A . . . all right," he said, "I'll see what I can do."

When she had gone Kit sat a long time and pondered upon her words. It seemed to him that if indeed she knew nothing of his story—and he had found no reason to believe that she did—she was a very wonderful woman, and that if her perspicuity was due to religion, Christian Science partook more of the nature of witchcraft than of anything that he had previously associated with religious teaching. He was bound to admit that when she had told him that his difficulties were due to fear, to his own fears and those of other people, she was perfectly right. What she did not know, however, was, that the Truth in his case would probably land him in far greater difficulties than any from which it would deliver him. There seemed at any rate to be something more in Christian Science than just the usual exhortations about being good and going to church, which had never appealed to him very much, and it suddenly struck him that not only was it an extremely interesting and sensible sort of religion, but that it might possibly be

applied in a very practical manner to his own case. He did not of course grasp anything of the teaching of Christian Science : he did not know at all how it managed to cure people, nor did he much want to know ; but it seemed, on the face of it, and without going into boring details, quite a good idea to ally himself with a force which was so obviously helpful, and more especially with a lady of such undoubted ability as Mrs. Sutherland, whose views on the state of his mind were evidently identical with his own.

In pursuance of this idea he thought it might be as well to hear what Watts had to say about the matter : one must make a start somewhere, and Watts would do to begin with as well as anyone else.

"I say, Watts," he said presently, "do you know anything about Christian Science—have you ever heard of it before?"

"Oh yes, sir," replied Watts, rising from his usual seat by the window. "I've heard a good deal about it one way and another."

"I believe there's something in it, you know."

"Yes, sir," said Watts, "it's very fashionable just now, so I've been told. Sir Austen Temple, the great mental Specialist, what I was with before I come here, he's made a very good thing out of 'em this last year or two."

"But I thought" said Kit, "that they didn't believe in doctors?"

"More they don't, sir," replied Watts, "but their relations do. I believe Sir Austen's got a private asylum full of 'em, so I've heard."



"Dear me," said Kit, looking rather bothered, "is that so? Mind, Watts," he went on after a moment's pause, "I don't say I believe in it—I don't say I do, I don't say I don't. You see, my mind is perfectly open on the subject. There's no doubt a great deal to be said on both sides. But it would be a very extraordinary state of affairs if a man could be put in a lunatic asylum just because his religious views did not coincide with those of other people."

"I shouldn't worry about that, sir, if I was you," said Watts peaceably. "You don't want to go and get yourself worked up when there's no occasion. I don't 'old with too much religion meself, I seen it do a sight more 'arm than good. Here's Mrs. Brown coming in. She'll cheer you up a bit."

As Amy entered the room, her eyes shining and her cheeks rosy after a walk in the cool autumn air, Kit suddenly bethought himself of the disastrous advertisement, which the original ideas of his visitor had almost driven out of his mind, and he returned his wife's bright greeting with a gloomy nod.

"I hear Mrs. Sutherland has been here," said Amy, "I'm glad you saw her, it does you good to see people. She's a dear old thing, isn't she, so kind and cheery?"

"Yes, she is," said Kit, looking at his wife with deep meaning, "very different from other people! *She* doesn't ram it down your throat morning, noon, and night that you're a poor silly

imbecile. And I should like to know, Amy," he added hotly, "what on earth you mean by putting that rotten advertisement in the paper?"

Amy looked confused for a moment.

"Oh dear," she said regretfully, "did you see it? How stupid of me: I ought to have kept it out of the way. The fact is, the doctor simply insisted upon it. He isn't at all satisfied with the way things are going."

"And I'm not satisfied either, I can tell you . . ." said Kit crossly. "It makes me look a perfect fool, that's what it does. 'Apply Mrs. Brown' indeed! And what's more, I can't afford to have twenty pounds chucked away for nothing."

"But, darling," said Amy mildly, "if it helps you to get better you can afford it, and it's very important that we should know more about what you did on Thursday night. I daresay," she added consolingly, "that your father will pay it."

"Well, I know I'm not going to," said Kit. "I shan't pay a penny, not a cent. And what's more, Amy, if you find that it causes a great deal more trouble than you expect, you'll only have yourself to blame. I . . . I try to spare you in every way I can . . . and this is the way you treat me. I must say I'm very annoyed about the whole thing."

"Never mind, old darling," said Amy kindly, "after all it only says you had an accident, and everybody knows that by now. I was very

careful how I worded it. What did Mrs. Sutherland have to talk about?"

Watts, perceiving, from the expression of his patient's face, that the tactful Mrs. Brown was coping successfully with an awkward situation, and diverting her husband's attention in the clever way that she invariably did, rose silently and edged himself stealthily out of the room.

"Well, I suppose it can't be helped now," said Kit; "I only hope you won't be sorry that you didn't ask my advice before you did such a silly thing."

He then related to his wife all that Mrs. Sutherland had told him, and the encouraging view that she took of his condition.

"I can't help thinking," he added, "that she's right; at any rate there seems to be something more in Christian Science than I thought there was."

"Of course," agreed Amy at once, "there's a great deal in it that I like immensely. I think the part about Love is simply beautiful."

"Love?" repeated Kit vaguely, "she didn't say anything about that. She was very keen on Truth, and in a way, of course, she's not far wrong."

"Yes," said Amy, "*and* Love. Truth is all right in a way, but I always think Love is really more important."

"But you do believe," asked Kit, eyeing his wife dubiously, "that they can really cure people?"

"I don't know," replied Amy with some hesita-

tion. "Did you think of trying it? I don't know that it could do you much harm now, as long as you didn't say anything to the doctor about it. Of course, it would offend him awfully if he found out, he can't bear Christian Science."

"I shouldn't care what the doctor thought," said Kit recklessly, "if it did me any good. That's more than he's done. I blame him for most of this bother."

"I'm sure he's done his best, poor man," said Amy.

"I don't believe, mind you," continued Kit, "that there's anything wrong with my brain at all, and I never shall, bar of course losing my memory for an hour or two, which is a thing that might happen to anyone. What she said was, that you people who think me mad are just as mad as I should be if I were. Do you see?"

"No," said Amy, "I don't quite. It seems to me that, if madness is unreal, we can't be mad any more than you can be; but of course I don't understand Christian Science."

Kit frowned.

"Well, it didn't sound like that at all when she said it. And, anyhow, I've rather taken a fancy to Mrs. Sutherland, she's a nice cheery woman, and she knows what she's talking about. Of course," he added, "we shall all have to be cured or it's not much use; she made a great point of that."

"Very well, dear," said Amy good-naturedly, "you get cured first, then we'll see. I certainly

have heard of wonderful things they've done—if they're all true. But Kit, darling," she added coaxingly, "you won't offend the doctor, will you? Where should we be if either of the children were to be taken ill?"

"You needn't worry about that," Kit assured her, "I'm not such a fool as to think of trying it on the children."

"Very well then," said Amy cheerfully, "I'll help you all I can. It will be something for you to think about. You can read the books and Mrs. Sutherland will come in every day and cheer you up. I think it's quite a good idea, I wish I'd thought of it before. I'm sure you must be tired of magazines and things; Christian Science will be a nice change for you."



## CHAPTER XVI

JACK, when Lebah's letter eventually reached him, *via* the Grand Hotel and his bank, grinned to himself in quite an unusually expressive manner, as he put it in his pocket and strolled off to find old Mackenzie, who was sure to be either feeding the chickens, mowing the lawn, or performing one of those domestic operations that he loved and his guest found so tedious. Although the two had been at school together, and remained close friends ever since, it never occurred to either of them to be in the least confidential ; so that when Jack announced that he had received a letter and was sorry he would have to lurch back to town before lunch, old Mac merely nodded and replied :

"All right, old chap, come again soon," and both felt that the demands of etiquette had been fully observed.

It amused Jack extremely, as he raced in his swift and silent car through the country lanes, to think of the hole into which Brown had obviously got himself ; for he had no doubt whatever that the fiction of the lost memory was being successfully kept up and that the inquisitive Mrs. Brown

had inserted the advertisement unknown to her husband. He knew that no accident had befallen Lebah's other young man on the night of the eighteenth, and that he had reached home in safety, and the idea of his having to disburse to the extent of £20 for the benefit of Bertha rather appealed to his peculiar sense of humour.

It was not, however, entirely at the vicissitudes of Brown that he smiled to himself as he went along. The thought of Lebah's characteristic summons entertained him greatly. It was so like her to ignore anything for which she might be expected to apologize, to offer no explanations, no excuses to mitigate the enormity of her behaviour. He liked immensely the way she had from the first taken him for granted, and the fact that in an emergency she had so promptly sent for him pleased him quite unexpectedly, not only because it gave him an excuse to go to her as he was longing to do, but also because he particularly admired the resourceful way in which she had gone to work to attain her ends. For he easily read between the lines of her letter most of what she had been so careful not to say, and his soul rejoiced within him, in spite of himself and whatever the result might be. Evidently Lebah had taken him greatly to heart, and he was man enough to forget everything excepting that one exhilarating fact as he hurried back to her. He did not stop to consider his cherished antipathy to marriage, nor call upon his experience for help to devise other means towards his end. He did not in fact bother anything about the end nor the way to

reach it : he simply recognized with a bounding pulse that Lebah wanted him and that he was going to her as fast as wheels could carry him. If she had called to him from hell, he must have careered down the hill with exactly the same reckless speed ; or, if she had beckoned him from Above, he would just as earnestly have striven upwards, although that would have been a strenuous and trying undertaking for him, and it is probable that he would have been very disappointed when he got there.

However, there were no supernatural risks to run, and he reached his hotel in town without hindrance or mishap of any kind whatever, about four o'clock on the same day as he received her summons. After a hasty change, and a long drink to steady his nerves, he sauntered along to Shaftesbury Avenue, and, climbing up the dingy flight of steps, found himself once more at the familiar door.

Lebah herself opened it, and greeted him with a cool and indifferent smile without offering to shake hands.

"Come in," she said, leaving him to shut the door after him, "I'm glad you got my letter, I didn't know where to send it to."

"I was down in Norfolk," said Jack, following her into the sitting-room. "I've only been back half an hour."

"Really ! You went off in a great hurry, didn't you ? I didn't know you intended leaving town."

"Neither did I," replied Jack, falling in with her mood. "But when I saw that other feller

I thought it was time to clear out. I don't like a crowd, you know, Lebah."

Lebah smiled faintly.

"Quite," she agreed with composure. "Brown was awfully in the way."

Jack looked her very hard in the face, his impassive mask seemed to drop from him as his keen eyes probed into the brown depths of hers: evasive, baffling, guarding her secrets as well as they had ever done.

"Look here," he said. "Will you tell me straight: is he anything to you at all?"

"No," replied Lebah, meeting his gaze quite simply, "nothing whatever."

"Has he ever been?"

"No, never."

"But he's made love to you, I suppose?"

"Of course, that's what he came for."

"Then why did you let him hang about if you didn't want him?" asked Jack with some asperity.

"Heaven knows," said Lebah casually; "it was too much trouble, I suppose, to clear him out till you came along; and by that time he'd taken root, and I couldn't move him."

"But I never saw him about," said Jack suspiciously. "How did you manage to run the brace of us all that time?"

"Oh, I didn't," explained Lebah; "I gave him the frozen mit a fortnight ago, as I told you, and I hadn't seen him since, until that night. If he hadn't happened to knock three times on the door he would never have got inside, I promise you."

Jack paused a minute, and removed his searching eyes from her face.

"It was an awful jolt for me, you know," he said presently, "seeing him burst out of the cupboard like that."

"Me too," said Lebah candidly.

They both laughed at the remembrance, and the ghost of Christopher Brown melted into thin air and disappeared for ever from between them.

"But tell me," said Lebah, "what do you think's happened to him? What did you do with him after you left here?"

"Put him in a taxi," replied Jack, "and sent him home—or thereabouts; and, to make sure he'd got there safely, I called the next day on his wife."

Lebah stared at him in amazement.

"You didn't!" she exclaimed incredulously.

"Fact," affirmed Jack seriously. "I went to Uppington to see the aunt I spoke to you about, and the first place she took me was to a Mrs. Brown's to leave some books—she was on the way there when I met her in the street. Of course I had no earthly idea who Mrs. Brown might be, and we were all getting on like a house on fire when I walked her husband, and I recognized our friend of the night before. His head was all bandaged up, and he appeared in his dressing gown; it seems he was having a day's rest after his adventures, with the family doctor in attendance."

"Not really," laughed Lebah. "Go on with the story."

"Fortunately, just before he arrived I'd almost



tumbled to things. It appears Brown had gone home with the yarn that he'd entirely lost his memory, and couldn't remember anything that had occurred the day before, or how he came by the bruise on his head, rather a bright idea that, wasn't it? "

"How exactly like him," said Lebah. "I'm enjoying all this immensely, do go on."

"So, of course, I was going to lie very low and say nothing. But Brown wouldn't have it that way at all. He was so bowled over by the sight of me there, that he forgot all about his lapse of memory and accused me right away of giving things away to his wife."

"Oh dear, so it all came out?" asked Lebah.

"No, it didn't," said Jack, "because while I was tryin' to hedge a bit so as to give him time to pull himself together, he got frightfully rattled and abused me like a pick-pocket, and they all thought he'd gone clean off his head, as of course they believed he'd never set eyes on me before. The climax was the funniest thing I've ever seen in my life. Brown got in a perfectly homicidal rage and tried to chuck me out of the house, whereupon the doctor, who apparently was hiding behind the door all the time, rushed in with a gardener chap and they pounced on poor Brown and held him by force in a chair, thinking he'd gone raving mad."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lebah sympathetically.

"Both the women went off into hysterics, the servants came tearing in to see what all the row

was about, and Brown foamed at the mouth in his efforts to escape, and looked more like the real thing than anything I've ever seen."

"Well, I suppose then you had to explain?" asked Lebah.

"Not I," said Jack, "I left that for him to do. It was none of my business, and if he liked to spoof his wife into thinking him mad, rather than own up to what he'd been doing, I wasn't going to interfere with him."

"I suppose," said Lebah, after a moment's thought, "that some one discovered my handkerchief in his pocket."

"You can bet he didn't find it himself," said Jack, "or it would have gone into the fire, and we should never have heard anything about it."

"And, of course," continued Lebah, "he knows nothing about the advertisement, or it wouldn't be there. I can't help thinking," she added thoughtfully, "that he's ill, or why should they have put it in? Bertha says it reads as though he's dead, and that I shall have the police here making inquiries before long."

"Oh rats!" exclaimed Jack. "He's all right, don't you bother about him."

"I wish," suggested Lebah, "that you would go down to Uppington and find out what's going on. If there's really anything wrong, and his people are on my track, I should like to know."

"I will, if you like," replied Jack dubiously, "but my own idea is, keep out of it. I never believe in looking for trouble."

"Yes," urged Lebah, "I want you to go. You needn't, of course, say why you've gone; just keep your eyes and ears open and find out how the land lies. Then we can see what to do, because Bertha is very keen on getting the money, and you may be sure she won't let it rest unless I can give her a very good reason for holding her peace."

"All right," said Jack without enthusiasm. "To tell you the truth, I'm getting about fed up with Brown. I didn't come rushing back to town to talk about him, you know."

Lebah barely glanced at him out of the corner of her eye.

"Sorry I've bored you," she said lightly. "What did you come to talk about?"

"About you—and me."

"We got all that over first," replied Lebah, "before we began about Kit."

"Yes," answered Jack, "but there's a good deal more to be said on the subject. However," he added, rising and looking coolly at her, "you look so business-like and wideawake this afternoon, that you completely unnerve me. I'll take myself off now, and come and see you later, after the theatre; will you be more approachable by that time, do you think?"

Lebah smiled enigmatically.

"Perhaps you're right," she said. "Good-bye."

Jack, although his ardour was considerably damped by Lebah's cool reception of him, realized as he walked back to his hotel that he was rather

pleased than otherwise that it should be so. If she had fallen on his neck and welcomed him with open arms, he told himself that he would have been disappointed in her. And moreover, as he had not in the least decided what he meant to say to her—so taken up with the thought of seeing her again had he been—it was as well, perhaps, that he should have time fully to consider the situation and make up his mind as to whether he intended to propose marriage to her or not.

It has been said before that Jack's morals were of an elementary and incongruous description; but he was not, on that account, an immoral man within the meaning of the word. Rather had he an innate disrespect for existing conventions and arbitrary distinctions of right and wrong. His hatred of the marriage tie was not so much due to a desire for promiscuous love-making, as to a rabid horror of any sort of restriction upon his freedom. It was the same feeling which, a few years previously, had induced him to resign his commission in the army before, as he expressed it, he was kicked out. He possessed that roving and restless spirit of adventure, which has been responsible for a great deal more iniquity than Original Sin; and he knew, no one better, that he was not of the stuff of which good husbands are made. His soul positively writhed within him at the thought of a discontented wife—a wronged wife, with a grievance, however legitimate it might be; and, although he felt that Lebah understood him better than any other woman, he yet hesitated to give into her hands

the power that he knew his wife would have over him.

He did not, however, in the least want to hurt her feelings, or to say anything to her, which she could by any possibility consider insulting. It was his honest conviction that they stood a much better chance of happiness together if they were not bound by any legal tie ; and the question of how to induce Lebah to see the matter in the same light was one that caused him much anxious deliberation during the few hours that elapsed before he saw her again. For he had quite decided not to shirk the vital issue any longer. It must be settled one way or another before he slept that night. He felt that he loved her as deeply as it was possible for him to love any woman, and he meant by hook or by crook to secure her for his own before he was much older. Whether he would have to give up his beloved liberty remained to be seen ; he determined at any rate to make a fight for it, and he wished, as many a man has wished before him, that he could see into the mind of his Divinity and learn exactly what she thought about it all before committing himself irretrievably on the subject.

After the play was over, Lebah changed hastily into her little red silk frock again, and hurried from the warm, human scented dressing-room of the theatre, out into the cold night air. Swiftly she sped along the crowded, brilliantly-lighted streets, back to her own cosy flat up amongst the stars and the chimney pots.



The sitting-room looked much more inviting under the softening influence of shaded lights than it did on that day, over a month before, when Kit waited there in the full glare of the afternoon sun. A bright fire was burning on the hearth, and curtains were drawn to hide the ugly windows. An air of peace and comfortable homeliness pervaded the little apartment; and, in the dim light, even the colours of the cheap and gaudy carpet ceased from their perpetual wrangle with one another, and blended softly into one harmonious whole.

Lebah herself also seemed to have changed in some subtle, indefinable way. Her eyes had lost something of their mournful brooding look, and her scarlet lips most of their bitterness. The red silk frock was infinitely more becoming than the purple satin kimono had been, and Lebah, as she lay back in her favourite chair, a little pensive after her evening's work, was a very alluring sight for any man to gaze upon.

As the tiny clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven, she caught the sound of familiar footsteps in the stone passage outside, and rose to open the door without giving Jack time to knock for admittance.

He entered silently, and followed her into the sitting-room without saying a word.

Lebah, watching him out of the corner of her eyes, perceived that her hour had come, and sat down again before the fire with a tiny sigh of nervous anticipation.

"You look particularly merry and bright this evening," she observed presently, when Jack's silence was growing oppressive.

Jack took the arm-chair on the other side of the hearth and began to search for the inevitable cigarette in his pockets.

"I'm anything but that," he remarked shortly. "I'm in the most pitiable funk, Lebah, if you only knew it. I daresay, though," he added bitterly, "it's perfectly obvious—it must be."

Lebah looked at him with interest.

"What are you in a funk about?" she inquired gently.

"The whole thing," replied Jack dejectedly. "I don't like the look of it at all. You know as well as I do that I'd never make a married man. I should only spoil your life, Lebah, and I don't want to do that."

Lebah smiled curiously at him.

"What are you talking about?" she asked. "Is this a proposal of marriage?"

"No, no, hold on," cried Jack nervously, raising his skinny hand. "Don't be in such a hurry, that's the one thing it's *not*."

"Sorry," laughed Lebah. "Start again then, and let's hear what it's all about."

"It's like this," began Jack anxiously. "You see, I'm expiring to marry you, but, on the other hand, I don't mind telling you the woman's not born that I could stick to for ever and ever. What I feel is: I have no right to ask

you to be my wife; it would be a dog's life for you."

Lebah paused a fraction of a second before replying.

"That's all right, then," she said lightly, "you haven't done so up to the present."

Jack's green eyes sought hers eagerly.

"Aren't you going to help me out?" he asked plaintively. "I'm not much of a hand at explanations and arguments, and all that sort of tosh; but when it comes to lovin' you, I'm all over it. I'm very bad to beat in that line, I can tell you."

He paused, but Lebah was looking straight into the fire and made no reply.

"I've been crazy about you ever since I first set eyes on you at Brighton," he urged. "Look here, Lebah, do you care anything about me?"

"Yes," said Lebah shortly, without looking at him.

"But you don't like the way I'm going to work, is that it?"

"Yes," said Lebah again, still gazing obstinately into the fire. "*I hate it.*"

Jack was suddenly seized with compunction. Something in the pensive droop of her lips appealed violently to him. He dropped easily on to one knee beside her chair and placed his hand over hers as it lay in her lap.

"All right then," he said. "Look here, marry me, then, if you want to, will you?"

Lebah turned and looked at him.

"You aren't eloquent enough about it to please me," she said slowly. "What's wrong with marrying me, aren't I good enough for you?"

"Much too good," replied Jack, pressing her hand. "Don't be silly."

"I suppose you think," she went on steadily, "that I'm not quite the sort of girl you ought to marry. Your idea is something very young and downy, who doesn't know the kind of devil you are, and whose tender heart you would break in a month, isn't that it?"

"You're quite wrong," said Jack evenly. "That sort of girl would bore me stiff before we got out of the church. I'd far sooner shoot myself right away than tackle a proposition like that. I don't mind telling you that if I have to have a wife at all, I want just the opposite of all that. I want a girl who knows how to look after herself, and me too if necessary, not a tame little domestic animal I'd have to lead about on a piece of string in case she got lost."

He rose impatiently to his feet, and began to pace up and down the room.

"You don't know," he said, "what a horror I've always had of marriage. It makes a man look such a confounded fool, that's my idea. Always hanging about waiting on a woman; or, if she's not that sort, she toddles after him, which I'd loathe even more. You've only got to look in any married man's face to see what a miserable beast he is;

and if he's not, then he's one of those despicable fools who enjoy that sort of thing. I don't believe there's such a thing as a love that would stand the strain of matrimony for long. After the first year it becomes simply a case of endurance on both sides: who can hold out the longest, and the honours generally go to the wife, from all I've seen. It's a woman's game: it's not a man's game at all. Marriage ought to be frankly recognized as a profession for females; it ought not to be binding on men in any way, except of course financially in some degree for the sake of the children. It's an insult to a man's intelligence to expect him to choose, at one period of his life, a woman who'll suit him all his days. The man isn't born who could do it; and, if he is, he ought to be shot—before he bores his wife to death!"

He stopped, looking savagely at Lebah as though she were responsible for this unsatisfactory state of the relations between the sexes.

Lebah regarded him with shining eyes.

"I love all that," she said simply. "I think you'll do nicely for me."

Jack grinned.

"But don't you agree with me?" he demanded.

"Certainly, with a great deal of it," replied Lebah. "I think it's utterly absurd to expect a man, or a woman either for that matter, to choose a person who will satisfy them all their lives. One changes so rapidly: what you like at twenty, you detest at thirty."



"Quite," said Jack dubiously; "but, of course, I was speaking more of men than women."

"It applies to both," said Lebah calmly.

"It does nothing of the kind," said Jack. "Women are more faithful by nature than men are—it's their business to be—and, if I see you so much as look at another fellow once you belong to me, I warn you there'll be hell to pay!"

"I don't mind that a bit," laughed Lebah. "I'm accustomed to it."

"For heaven's sake," exclaimed Jack, striding across the room to where she sat, "don't make me jealous! That's the one thing I utterly bar. I can stand anything but that, do you hear?"

Lebah rose and faced him.

"Look here, old fireworks," she said affectionately, "don't get in such a stew about nothing. I always thought you were one of these calm and self-possessed individs. . . ."

"Well, I'm not," said Jack, catching her suddenly in his arms, "not by any manner of means. You've got a lot to learn yet. Here, give me a kiss. *Yes, come on.*"

"When will you be ready—to-morrow?"

"No, bless the boy!"

"Monday, then, not a day later."

"What about the theatre? I can't leave at a moment's notice."

"Anyhow, we'll get married on Monday," said

Jack decisively, "and square up everything afterwards."

"Monday then," murmured Lebah, with a happy sigh of pure content, "and I can get my things in Paris when we go on our honeymoon; we'll choose them together!"

## CHAPTER XVII

CHRISTOPHER was getting along nicely with C.S., and Mrs. Sutherland was delighted with him. Seldom had she known a more enthusiastic disciple, nor one who so eagerly gulped down everything he was told. There was nothing too abstract or too difficult for him to swallow. He not only appeared to grasp the subject with a rare and refreshing earnestness of purpose, but he seemed absolutely undaunted by any of those problems that beset the path of the average beginner. His mind and all his hopes were set upon recovery, and he was both willing and anxious to adopt any tenets that were necessary to achieve that end. There was also a pleasing humility about his attitude towards her teaching; he did not, like so many converts, in the pride of their intellect, argue and question the truth of her statements. He realized quite frankly that it was impossible for his mortal mind fully to comprehend the intricacies of so stupendous an idea, and appeared contented with his limitations.

Indeed, if it had not been for Mrs. Sutherland's indefatigable industry, it is doubtful whether he would have gained any benefit whatever from his

conversion. She, however, having once taken him in hand, was determined that the thing should be thoroughly well done : and, whether he liked it or not, he was obliged to listen to elaborate explanations of a doctrine that he was quite prepared to accept as it stood. She made him read and read again her magic Book—*Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures*—till his brain reeled and his bewildered mind groped in vain for the meaning of it all. However, he persevered nobly under her cheerful encouragement, and after a time managed to extract from its chaotic redundancy a few simple rules, which he found very useful in helping him to understand her complicated creed.

Perhaps of these, the easiest was this : that if you could say a thing back side foremost, the fact of your being able to do so proved it to be true—as in arithmetic, figures added up together in any order produce the same result. As thus :

There is no Pain in Truth ;  
There is no Truth in Pain :

or,

There is no Matter in Good ;  
There is no Good in Matter.

By means of this rule he soon learned easily to distinguish the True from the False, the Real from the Unreal, always a stumbling-block for the ambitious amateur.

He also discovered a few maxims, which seemed to shed a particular light on his own case, and to which he clung with desperate tenacity. It appeared that

anything that was bad, painful, or objectionable in any way was to be regarded as Unreal. You were not allowed to talk about it, nor even to think about it ; and this seemed to Kit a very sensible idea. By this process you eliminated the troubles and ills of other people as well as all your own mistakes and misdeeds, and were thus enabled to start again on a new and peaceful career of rectitude, unhampered by the consequences of your own past. It was comforting to reflect that what you supposed to have been a sin was not a sin at all, but the ignorant delusion of a person whom you once supposed yourself to be, or, as Mrs. Sutherland put it, an error of Mortal Mind. It seemed to Kit very evident that no responsibility could possibly attach itself to him for the actions of that mythical Kit, that compromising entity whom he now so gladly and so earnestly repudiated.

He also found it quite easy to realize that Mortal Mind, or what he had previously called "thought," was responsible for all the trouble, all the sin and suffering in the world. Obviously, if you didn't think about a thing it couldn't bother you ; also, if you had no mind with which to know you had a pain, you could not feel it, at any rate you would not know you felt it, which was good enough for anybody. And so he tried very hard to banish from his own mind all thoughts of his difficulties, and often rebuked Amy quite seriously when she inadvertently reminded him of them. He was convinced that in a very short time he would have so far progressed in Science as to be able to announce



himself cured, and he felt that, with Mrs. Sutherland's assistance and influence, it would not be difficult to overcome the objections of his family and the doctor, so that he might be able so resume his proper place in the world again.

Already a marked change had taken place in his demeanour. The gloom and dejection of the previous few weeks had entirely disappeared, his spirits had risen astonishingly, and a bright and hopeful smile illuminated his countenance, especially when Amy was there to see it.

It must not be imagined that Kit was at all insincere in his conversion to Christian Science ; for, although he knew himself to be perfectly sane, he yet realized that he badly needed assistance to extricate himself from the predicament into which his own foolishness had led him ; and he honestly and ardently desired to rid himself of that Sin, which he had proved, without doubt, was indeed, as Mrs. Sutherland said, the Cause of all Suffering, both mental and physical. The adoption of C.S. seemed to him an easy and practical way out of a difficult situation, and if he appeared grateful for its help, and hopeful as to the future, it was no more than he actually felt.

In spite of Mrs. Sutherland's protestations, Watts still remained in the house, but Kit, now that he saw there was a reasonable prospect of getting rid of him, no longer disliked him as furiously as before. In fact, Watts made himself useful in so many ways that he was becoming quite an acquisition, and there were times when Kit felt that he should miss

him when he went away. It was a relief, for instance, never to have to brush one's own clothes, or do up one's boots; pleasant to have someone always handy to pop out and get an evening paper, or to run upstairs and get things you had forgotten. Certainly Watts was a very obliging fellow, and quite a decent chap to go for a walk with. For Kit no longer stayed bashfully in the house. Every day he might be seen, accompanied by his nurse, strolling by the riverside or into the park to watch the deer, much to the delight of all Uppington; and, so far from shrinking from the curious gaze of the public, it often entertained him hugely to think how surprised everybody would be when in a week or two they learned that C.S. had cured him.

Often the two went as far as Mrs. Sutherland's house, where Watts would wait in the hall or in the kitchen while his master received instruction in the lady's own sanctum.

It was just a fortnight after his accident that, sitting one morning in one of her comfortable leather arm-chairs, he ventured to put a question which had been troubling his mind for a considerable time.

"How shall I know," he inquired, "when I'm . . . er . . . cured?"

"The vurry minute," said Mrs. Sutherland, "that you realize that there's nothing the matter with you."

"Well, do you know then," said Kit with a most engaging smile, "I believe I'm all right now. My head feels perfectly clear, perfectly

normal. I don't know that I've felt better in my life than I do now, taking it all round."

Mrs. Sutherland regarded him earnestly.

"I don't want you to feel you're better," she said in her deep, vibrant voice. "I want you to know that you were never sick. I want you to see the unreality of all pain and of all sin. Turn up page 489. Mrs. Eddy says here, 'The less mind there is in matter the better. When the unthinking lobster loses its claw, it grows again; if the Science of Life were understood, the human limb would grow as readily as the lobster's claw.' But it doesn't grow, Mr. Brown, by wondering when it's going to; it grows only by the consciousness that it was never lost."

This was a little out of Kit's depth, and, moreover, being of a practical turn of mind, he saw no reason for troubling himself about the loss of a limb that he still possessed.

"I see what you mean," he said amiably. "Of course, all along I've kept steadily to my idea that there's nothing the matter with me, and I suppose that's how I've got better so quickly. The only thing is," he asked anxiously, "how am I going to make Amy believe it? How am I going to get rid of Watts and get back to my work?"

"When you're ready to do without the crutch of material sense, you will find you can walk alone without any assistance from me, and you will see your path clearly. You must wait patiently till that time comes. Don't harbour any feelings of antagonism

to your present surroundings. Fill your mind with Love, and Love will find out a way. Above all, read Mrs. Eddy's Book and follow her instructions exactly as far as you can understand them, and you will soon discover for yourself what is the right course for you to take."

"Her instructions aren't always very clear," said Kit doubtfully. "I was going to ask you, what about smoking? She says here," he began turning over the leaves rapidly, 'Puffing the noxious fumes of tobacco, or chewing a leaf naturally attractive to no animal except a loathsome worm, is at least disgusting.' That sounds to me," said Kit, "as though she doesn't approve of it."

Mrs. Sutherland paused a moment before replying.

"Do you smoke much?" she inquired.

"I do," replied Kit. "I'm very fond of my pipe. I don't really believe I could exist without a smoke now and again."

"Vurry well then," said Mrs. Sutherland. "As long as you feel like that it's no use your giving up the tobacco habit. The hankering after it, your misery without it, will only confirm you in your opinion that it is necessary to you. You must wait till you know it isn't."

Kit heaved a sigh of relief.

"And what about drinks?" he ventured hopefully.

"There again, you must wait till you realize the unreality of the pleasure that alcohol produces."

"That's all right, then," said Kit comfortably. "I just wanted to ask you about them because I know that most religions are down on tobacco and drinks. However, what you say only proves to me that Mrs. Eddy knows what she's talking about. She doesn't expect a chap to be a saint all at once, like some of these parsons. I can't see, myself, any harm in a glass of wine or a pipe of tobacco as long as you can afford them."

Mrs. Sutherland smiled indulgently at him.

"You will, some day," she said kindly, "when you are more advanced."

As she spoke, the loud hoot of a motor horn was heard outside in the carriage drive, and she rose and went over to the window to see who her visitor might be. After one cursory glance, she turned again, and faced Kit with a commanding eye.

"Now see here, Mr. Brown," she began firmly; "I'm going to treat you like a puffickly well man; you come and look out of this window—nothing to be afraid of, I'm holding the right thot for you."

Kit crossed over to her side, and his heart gave a violent thump within him, for there, before his eyes, was Jack Vibart, and seated beside him was a lady gorgeously attired in a profusion of motor veils, whom he recognized only too well.

"Oh I say," he gasped nervously, "this is just what I was afraid of. I . . . I think I'd better go."

Mrs. Sutherland laid a plump hand firmly on his arm.



"You stay right here," she insisted, "and don't you be afraid. Remember, Fear is your worst enemy. Cast it out, and fill your mind with thots of Love. Here's the vurry chance you've been seeking to make a proper start in C.S."

Kit met her gaze with a wavering and very anxious eye.

"I daresay you're right," he said uncertainly. "But I wish I could have started on something easier."

"Remember Love is *All*," continued Mrs. Sutherland confidently. "Put away your unkind thots of Jack, and you will see how wonderfully Love smoothes the way to perfect peace. I reckon you're going to be a reel credit to C.S."

"All right," said Kit desperately, "I . . . I'll try. Will they be shown in here?"

"No, I never have anyone brot in here when I'm engaged," replied Mrs. Sutherland. "Annie will take them into the drawing-room. I don't know who it is he's got with him; however, I will go in first, and you stay here quietly by yourself and think over what I've told you. Then when you feel good and strong, come in and join us; just try and meet Jack like an ordinary acquaintance, and you'll be surprised how easy everything is going to be for you. What a triumph, Mr. Brown, if you could go back and tell your wife that, thanks to C.S., you had got over your delusions about my nephew!"

"Yes," agreed Kit, "it would be, I only wish I could. I . . . I think perhaps I'd better see him, under the circumstances, but . . ."

"No, no buts, no more doubts and fears," interrupted Mrs. Sutherland, as a discreet tapping was heard at the door.

When she had left the room, dark and lowering clouds of gloom and foreboding descended on her convert, and he sank into the very depths of despair. For he knew only too well that Lebah had come in answer to Amy's advertisement, and the fact that Mrs. Sutherland was to be consulted before the news was broken to his wife increased tremendously the ghastliness of the situation. There was evidently now not the slightest possibility of concealment. Not only would his original unfaithfulness be revealed to Amy, but the whole of his subsequent deception. How from the first he had misled her and deluded every one around him. He dreaded to think what the effect on Amy would be when she learned that all her loving sympathy and commiseration had been obtained under false pretences : that he had allowed her to suffer all this time under the dreadful fear that his mind was diseased, when by a word he could have proved to her that it was not, and saved her all the terrible anxiety of the last ten days.

He thought also of kind Mrs. Sutherland and all the trouble she had taken—of the hours spent in exhortation and explanation to try and cure him, and he felt miserably that he could never look her in the face again once she knew the truth. Perhaps even now she might be listening to the story of his perfidy ! At any moment she might return and abase him to the earth with her

eloquent and penetrating grey eyes—those eyes into which he had hitherto looked for encouragement and approbation, but which would from henceforth be filled with scorn and upbraiding. He felt he could never stand such a ghastly ordeal. Amy, whatever she might say or look, at any rate had not gimlet eyes with which to pierce his very soul : her eyes were soft and blue ; at their worst they would only be reproachful—perhaps a tiny bit resentful.

He stood still, staring out of the window, lost in thought.

After all, he reflected, Amy was his wife ; he had a sort of right to look to her for help and protection in the hour of trial ; and, though he realized with deep regret that he had wronged her both in his disloyalty and in his subsequent deception, it was now too late to undo what had been done, and it behoved both of them to make the best of things as they were. No doubt Amy would be able to see it in that light.

His eye travelled to the huge, grey car, and beyond it, down the well-kept drive to the heavy iron gates standing ajar, and a stealthy resolve formed itself in his mind. Not a soul was in sight, not a sound to be heard. Very gently he slid back the window catch and cautiously raised the window a few inches. As this daring feat produced no untoward result, his courage somewhat returned to him and he opened it a little wider. Then with a wildly beating heart he climbed through it and dropped softly on to the flower beds a few feet beneath it.

It was the work of a moment to tiptoe across

the gravel path and over the grass to the shelter of the trees, which bordered the drive. There, secure from prying eyes, he gradually made his way to the gates and out into the road. He wore no hat, but he hardly gave his appearance a passing thought, so eager was he to get back to Amy. His one anxiety was to reach her before anyone else had time to pour his—or her—incriminating stories into her ear, to give her his own version of what had occurred, and if possible to enlist her sympathy and help, to carry him through the forthcoming crisis. He felt that if she were on his side it would be much easier to face everything, and he was confident that he could put things before her in such a light that she would realize he had been more sinned against than sinning. He would tell her of Lebah's designing nature, and the fatal attraction that she possessed for all men; of his frantic and ineffectual struggles to free himself from her spells; of Vibart's ruffianly assault upon him in a passion of utterly unfounded jealousy; and, finally, of his own well-meant but misguided attempt to spare her the unhappiness of knowing anything about his difficulties.

He would dwell on his sufferings, on his agony of remorse and his constant endeavour to reassure her that there was nothing the matter with him; and he felt that, on the whole, it would make a convincing and pathetic story, which would move the heart of any woman, especially of so kind and sympathetic a girl as his Amy. It also struck him, as he went along, that by thus taking the bull boldly by the horns

he would probably save himself twenty pounds : because the money being offered to the first person who could throw light on "the aforesaid proceedings," and he undoubtedly being that person, he had every right to claim the reward himself, and every intention of doing so.

This idea pleased him very much, and he smiled to himself to think how furious both Lebah and Jack would be when they discovered that he had forestalled them and frustrated their malignant designs. For Amy would certainly see him through ; he was sure that, when she saw his distress and the desperate plight he was in, her kind heart would melt with sympathy. The actual moment of confession might, in fact would, be very terrible, very harrowing ; and, as Kit tried to frame the exact phrases in which he would break it to her, he realized that it was going to be a most painful proceeding. He wished it had been possible to write instead of explaining in person—much easier to write. He saw a bus coming along the road ; and on the bus was written in large letters the word Hammersmith. Strange ideas began to float in his mind, breaking the sequence of his reflections and scattering his thoughts in all directions. Impossible, incredible ideas, yet somehow wonderfully alluring on the spur of the moment. Before he could crystallize them into a conscious resolve, he had stopped the bus and was climbing hastily up the steep and narrow iron staircase on to the top. And the bus proceeded on its reckless and dislocating career to London,



with Kit sitting on the front seat, minus a hat, and with a full and thankful heart beating violently under his waistcoat.

He felt as though he had been looking over a terrible precipice, expecting at any minute to be dashed to pieces on the cruel rocks below, and that somehow the bus had come along in the very nick of time and saved him. And he heaved frequent and fervent sighs of relief, as he watched the familiar houses disappearing one by one and realized that in less than an hour, with any luck at all, he would be quite out of danger. He kept an anxious look-out all along the road for the sight of any acquaintances, but Fate so far favoured him that he saw no one he knew. Every time that the bus stopped his heart seemed to stop with it, till he could assure himself that the new-comer was not a friend of Amy's. He turned up his coat collar and looked steadily in front of him, in case he should meet the eye of anyone walking in the street below, and whenever the bus passed another, going in the opposite direction, he anxiously scanned the faces of the people outside it for fear there should be one who could take back to Uppington the news of his escape.

At last, however, Hammersmith was reached in safety ; and Kit, having on the way very seriously considered his position and made certain plans as to his immediate future, got off the bus into the busy Broadway. He found that he only had five shillings and a few coppers in his pocket, but as he was well known at his bank in the City he

did not anticipate any difficulties in procuring further supplies, and at once expended one shilling and sixpence on a new tweed cap. It was not exactly a smart cap, indeed it was made chiefly of brown cotton, and Kit hated himself in it when he looked in the mirror of the hatter's shop. But the man assured him that it was the latest thing, and exactly what was being worn in the best society, and as there seemed to be nothing between that and a black bowler at four and elevenpence, which was more than he could afford, Kit felt that he must put up with it, as it was obviously impossible to travel hatless about London. He therefore paid the one and sixpence and proceeded to the Underground Railway where he took a ticket to Cannon Street, which was the nearest station to his bank.

It was pleasant to mingle again with his fellow-men, to rub shoulders with Tom, Dick and Harry, and to pass unnoticed in the hurrying crowds, which thronged the streets and the carriages, and his spirits rose by leaps and bounds as he realized that at last he had regained his freedom.

He was so light-hearted by the time he reached the bank that the clerk who usually served him congratulated him on his fit and jovial appearance.

"Some one told me you were ill," he remarked. "I can't say you look as though there was much the matter with you, Mr. Brown."

"I'm quite all right again, thanks," said Kit. "I had a few days at home, nothing much."

He was busily engaged in filling in the cheque, which the cashier had handed him on demand.

"There you are," he said cheerfully, "ten pounds, I think that'll do me."

"Take it in gold, sir?"

"Please," said Kit.

"Been a bit foggy lately," remarked the cashier conversationally.

"Has it? I've been out of town."

"Uppington, isn't it, where you live? Nice place, I was down the other Sunday."

"Not bad," said Kit, "but I'm staying in town just at present. At least, I've just come up. Do you happen to know of a decent little hotel? I don't want a noisy or expensive place, and not a boarding-house either. I generally stay at my club whenever I'm up for the night, but I think perhaps . . . that is, I wouldn't mind an hotel for a change."

The cashier pondered for a moment.

"Do you know the *Robin Hood* in Archer Street? It's a nice quiet little place, and I know they do you pretty well and don't charge too much for it."

"Thank you," said Kit as he slipped the gold into his hip pocket. "That sounds all right, I'll try it. Good morning."

It was almost an exciting experience to lunch again in the old familiar haunts, and Kit enjoyed his meal immensely. After it was over, he crossed the street to a tiny underground rendezvous of City men, and there in a cosy and pink-shaded tea-room he drank a delicious cup of coffee and flirted en-

thusiastically with the red-haired girl who served it. It was so exhilarating to be free once more that he felt on the best of terms with everything and everybody. He had hardly noticed, although he had been there many a time before, how pretty and amusing she was, nor what excellent coffee she served, and he was so grateful that he left a shilling secreted under the plate as a thank-offering.

The whole afternoon loomed before him, but there was much to be done. He must have some pyjamas and a bag to put them in before he could present himself at the hotel where he intended to spend the night. A telegram must be despatched to Amy, for he knew that his sudden disappearance would cause her considerable alarm, and he did not want to give her any more anxiety than was absolutely necessary.

After communing with himself for a long time at the post office counter, he eventually wrote one, which seemed to him to meet the case to a nicety :

“ Mrs. Brown, Elm Villa, Uppington.

Quite safe and happy don't worry writing best love C.”

This, he felt, was exactly what was needed. It would give him time to concoct the letter, which sooner or later must be written, and it would reassure Amy without giving her a hint of his plans or his whereabouts. If after receiving it she still persisted in worrying, she had only herself to blame.

After despatching the wire, he paid a visit to an outfitter's shop and purchased a suit of pyjamas

and one collar to put on the next morning; and these, wrapped up in a piece of brown paper, he carried as far as the nearest chemist, where he further invested in a sponge, a toothbrush, and a small hairbrush. Laden with his luggage he walked along till he saw in a shop window a beautiful brown leather bag for eight and sixpence. This he acquired without delay; and, putting inside it the two paper parcels containing his toilet accessories he was ready to claim admittance into the Robin Hood Hotel.

It proved to be a nice little place, just what he had wanted to find, and he was not long in choosing a room and unpacking his bag. The brushes looked very clean and fresh, so did the gay pink pyjamas lying on his pillow, and displaying, for all the world to see, a paper ticket marked in plain figures 10s. 6d.

It was his intention to give himself a really good dinner, and afterwards to spend the rest of the evening in the cheeriest Music Hall in London. But before he carried out this programme he resolved to write the inevitable letter to Amy, so that he would be free to enjoy himself without the thought of it hanging over his head.

He therefore went down into the hotel writing-room, and, carefully tearing off the front sheet of the notepaper so that no illuminating address might give anybody a chance to pay him a visit, sat down and began industriously to think. It was a letter that required a good deal of earnest deliberation, but eventually he decided what to say, and taking up a pen he began to write rapidly. In a very



few minutes the letter was finished ; and, glancing hastily through it, a satisfied smile stole over his features. It was, he knew, just the sort of letter to fetch Amy : he felt he had taken exactly the right tone and said neither too much nor too little.

He posted it with a light heart and proceeded cheerfully to carry out the programme he had arranged for himself. This he did with such marked success that, when about twelve o'clock that night he donned the pink pyjamas and turned in to bed, he felt that he had never spent a happier day in his life.

## CHAPTER XVIII

LEBAH had been Mrs. Vibart for only two days, when she decided to go with Jack to call on his aunt. She wanted, in the first place, to hear for herself all that Mrs. Sutherland had to say about Kit ; secondly, it seemed a good opportunity to make the acquaintance of one of her husband's relations ; and, thirdly, Jack refused to go without her. It occurred to both of them that there was a possibility of running up against Kit, and, wishing to avoid such an encounter equally for their own sakes and for his, they had timed their visit in the morning because there was less chance of meeting him then than during the afternoon. So that when, after the first introductions and explanations were over, and Mrs. Sutherland had somewhat recovered from the shock of having to accept a new relation at such short notice, the subject of Mr. Brown was launched with much tact and delicacy, it was a little disconcerting to learn that he was in the next room and would join them in a few minutes.

This was the last thing Lebah had expected, and she felt quite annoyed with Kit for always being in the way when he was not wanted. It was

very important in her opinion that she should make a good impression on Jack's religious aunt ; and, if she were to be confronted with an indignant and accusatory Kit, she realized that it would be very difficult to do so. The story, as Kit might quite possibly tell it, would reflect little credit on her, and would, in fact, make her out exactly the sort of girl she did not wish to be, the sort who would not be received with open arms by any family.

Mrs. Sutherland told Jack, in answer to his kind inquiry, that Mr. Brown had practically recovered, having more or less adopted the teaching of Christian Science, and that she had every reason to believe that in another week or so he would be able to return to his business.

" Naturally," she added, " surrounded as he is by the adverse thots of his family, and with the doctor in the house every day, his recovery is not as fast as I could wish ; but he's a vurry painstaking young man ; and, as he's never believed himself to be insane, it's not so difficult as it might be."

" But was he really ever mad ? " inquired Lebah incautiously.

" To Mortal Mind, yes," replied Mrs. Sutherland. " In Science, no, except in the sense that all sinners are insane. Mrs. Eddy says *All Sin is Insanity*. Every one who mistakes fable for fact is insane."

" What a mad world," laughed Lebah.

" Look here," said Jack, " I don't think I ought to upset Brown again if he's nearly better. We just looked in to see you as we happened to be

passing. As a matter of fact, we are on our way to lunch with some people at Surbiton."

"Yes," said Lebah, rising with alacrity. "I'm afraid we must be going, or we shall be late."

"You wait here just one moment," said Mrs. Sutherland hurriedly. "I'll go and fetch him. I vurry particularly want him to see you, Jack—it would be such a real triumph if he's lost that extraordinary delusion about you. I won't keep you a minute."

Jack and Lebah exchanged glances of helpless resignation as Mrs. Sutherland swept out of the room: evidently there was to be no escaping from the ubiquitous Kit.

"What a bore!" exclaimed Lebah in an anxious undertone. "What shall I say to him?"

"Wait till you see what tack he's on," advised Jack, "perhaps when he knows we're here he won't put in an appearance. I shouldn't be surprised."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when his aunt came rushing back into the room.

"He's gone!" she cried in great excitement. "The window's wide open; he must have escaped into the garden and got away. Land Sakes, I wouldn't have had this happen for worlds!"

Jack and Lebah received this astounding announcement with exactly the same expression of polite concern.

"Did he know we were here?" asked Jack, after a moment's pause.

"Certainly he did," replied Mrs. Sutherland, with a worried look. "He saw you in the car when you came up to the door."

"That's done it," said Jack with conviction. "He never liked the look of me. I expect he's cut off home."

Mrs. Sutherland sighed deeply.

"Waal," she said, "it's vurry discouraging, after all the trouble I've taken over that young man. I was beginning to hope great things about him. I suppose I must send his servant to look for him. I only hope," she added earnestly, as she left the room again, "that he's not hiding anywhere in the grounds. I'll be scared to go outside the house if he's got another of those attacks on him again."

Jack laughed impatiently.

"I wish we were well out of this," he said to his wife when they were left alone together. "Either we never ought to have come at all or else we should have explained the whole thing to my aunt. I've a good mind to do it when she comes back—what?"

"I don't think I should," advised Lebah. "After all, it's his business, not ours, and no doubt he'll wriggle through all right if we leave him alone. It would be rather low down to give him away at this stage, don't you think so?"

"But look at the position we're in," objected Jack, "a nice pair we shall look when it all comes out, as it's bound to do, for Brown's no stayer, I can see that. I tell you, I don't like the way things are going a little bit."



"Still," urged Lebah, who had her own reasons for exercising caution, "I don't think you will improve matters by giving him away. After all, you're keeping it dark for his sake, not your own; and, if anything does come out, people will quite understand that in a way your hands were tied by feelings of honour, and all that."

"Well, let's get out of this," said Jack irritably. "I'm absolutely fed up with Brown. I swear I'll never set foot in Uppington again. I've always hated the suburbs, and why I ever came here at all I don't know—ghastly hole!"

"Now that he's all right," said Lebah peaceably, "I shan't worry any more about him; it was only because I was afraid there might be inquiries on foot, and it's just as well to know where you are in cases of this kind."

"Thank heaven, we shall be in Paris this time next week," grunted Jack, as Mrs. Sutherland was heard outside in the hall talking in strident tones to Watts. "Come on," he added, "let's make a bolt for it."

You could have knocked Watts down with a feather when he learned that Mr. Brown had given him the slip. He had always, from the first, been strongly opposed to the idea of Christian Science, and this development only proved to him how well founded had been his objections. He had even gone so far as to consult with Dr. Bennett as to whether these visits could be permitted, but the doctor had only grinned good-naturedly and advised him to

keep an eye on them both ; so that, no support being forthcoming from that quarter, he had been powerless to interfere.

As soon as Mrs. Sutherland told him the alarming news, he sped with all haste round to the outside of the library window, where he had no difficulty in recognizing his master's footmarks in the damp soil of the flower-beds.

"That's them right enough," he remarked to Annie the housemaid, who accompanied him ; "but which way 'e's gorne, 'eaven only knows. Well, I suppose I must go and see if 'e's made for 'is own 'ome, but I don't expect for a moment 'e 'as, that's the larst place 'e'd make for. Wot's 'appened is this. 'E been took with another of these 'ere lapses o' memory and 'e's probably made back to the same place as where 'e 'ad the larst one. I can see my work is cut out over this job. However, they can't blame me, I told 'em all along that these 'ere goings on wouldn't lead to no good : I seen too much o' religion in my time."

"Oh well, it's kept 'im amused," said the housemaid, who was supposed to belong to the same church herself, or she would never have been there. "I don't see no 'arm in it meself, and I'm sure Mrs. Sutherland's as nice a lady as ever I worked for."

"I'm not saying anything against 'er," replied Watts. "All I say is, that there's a place for everything and a time for everything, and when a man's gorne orf 'is 'ead, and lorst 'is reason, 'e isn't in no fit state to argue about religion. Let 'er cure

'im if she likes ; an' let 'er stuff 'im up with all the religion 'e can swaller, but she ought to 'a known better than to leave 'im in a room by 'imself with the window open."

"I don't suppose," persisted Annie loyally, "that she ever gave it a thought. What should he want to escape for, anyway?"

"Why? Because that's the natural instinct of the lunatic," explained Watts, "it's the first thing 'e thinks about. You've always got to be on the look out for that—it's either that or suicide. I only 'ope 'e's come to no 'arm. Go and fetch me 'is 'at, there's a good girl; I must be ~~for~~orf, and lose no time about it."

On the way back to Elm Villa, Watts met two policemen, the baker's man, and the cook from next door who had been sent out on an errand, and each of them he interrogated as to whether they had seen his gentleman walking about without his hat. But nobody had seen him, and they all went their ways, in divers directions, with a new and exciting story to tell of the escaped lunatic at large in their midst.

When he reached Elm Villa no better luck awaited him. Mr. Brown had not returned home, and Mrs. Brown, when she heard the terrible story of her husband's disappearance, was almost distracted, and heaped reproaches on the head of the innocent Watts, which he considered both unjust and illogical.

"Of course, if I'd a known," he ~~re~~ protested, "what he was up to I should never 'ave let

'im out of my sight. But I was told to sit in the kitchen, and there I sat, never thinking nothing but what he was with the lady in the library."

"Where can he have gone?" sighed Amy. "There's been plenty of time for him to return home, if he meant to come."

"You can take it from me," said Watts, "'e won't come back here, not till 'e's brought. They never do. Wot 'e's done is to go up to town to the same place as wot he was at when he was took like this before. Do you happen to know how much money 'e 'ad in 'is pocket?"

"Only a few shillings, I believe," replied Mrs. Brown. "He asked me for some the other day, and I gave him what I had in my purse."

"Well then," said Watts hopefully, "'e can't 'ave gorne far. I think I'd better step along to the police station and tell them to keep a look out for 'im; and should I call in at the doctor's, he'll be just home for lunch, and he might be able to suggest something?"

"Yes, do," agreed Amy. "I'd better stay here in case my husband returns. I feel so worried I don't know which way to turn. It's terrible waiting here not able to do anything, but if he should come back some one ought to be here in case he goes off again."

"We shall 'ave 'm safe 'ome by nightfall, never fear," said Watts sympathetically. "The sooner the police knows the better. Wot set 'im orf," he added confidently, "was the sight of that

Captain Vibart : you recollect the effect 'e 'ad on 'im larst time. From what Mrs. Sutherland told me, I take it that 'e saw 'im out of the window and it brought it all back to 'im again."

"I suppose so," sighed Amy, "it's most extraordinary. But go now, Watts ; you can have your dinner when you come back. Ask the doctor what is the best thing for us to do, and do be as quick as you can ; I shall be so anxious till the police know about him. Poor dear fellow, tell them to be very careful with him and to let me know at once if there is any news of him."

Watts put on his black bowler hat again, and hurried off full of zeal on the track of his absconding patient.

Poor Amy felt very downhearted about her husband's disappearance, not only on account of any danger which might befall him, although the thought of that was alarming enough, but because it seemed to her that this latest escapade proved how very unreliable he was, and how necessary it had become to put him under proper control. Her heart ached to think what his feelings would be when he realized that he must go into a home, for she knew that, in spite of his other eccentricities, he was quite capable of appreciating the indignity of such a proceeding, and of suffering acutely under the enforced restraint. It was obviously impossible to guard him so carefully at home that he could never find an opportunity of escape, and the consequences of his being at large while his mind was



in such an unstable and dangerous condition might be very serious, not only to himself, but to other people. For if he were liable to take these sudden and violent antipathies to strangers, as in the case of Captain Vibart, there was no knowing what he might do, and it was clearly unsafe for him to be about by himself.

These and other harrowing aspects of the case did poor Mrs. Brown consider, while her husband, in the shady recesses of the city tea-shop, flirted diligently with the red-haired girl, and rejoiced mightily in his new-found freedom.

After a vain search amongst his clothes, lest perchance he had left any clues behind him, Amy made a poor luncheon alone in the dining-room, rather than face the merry chatter of the children in the nursery, and betook herself with her sewing to the drawing-room, to sit in the bay window overlooking the road, so that she might catch the first glimpse of her husband on his return. It seemed to her an eternity since the morning, when he had left his home so full of hope and enthusiasm over the cure that Mrs. Sutherland was performing, and she wondered if this tragedy was a visitation of divine providence, outraged at her desertion of the true religion. At any rate, she determined that she would return at once to the fold, where, with the doctor on one side and the clergyman on the other, you at least knew where you were in times of trouble. It was all very well, she reflected, to deny the reality of pain and suffering when you were perfectly free

from either, but when you found yourself plunged headlong into both of them, surrounded on all sides with difficulty and perplexity, then Christian Science was no use at all, and she decided that from henceforth she would give Mrs. Sutherland and her doctrines a wide berth lest further evil befell her and her family.

Suddenly she heard the click of the garden gate, and, looking up, saw the well-known figure of a telegraph boy striding up the path to the front door. She dropped her work and flew to answer his double knock.

Pale and trembling she snatched the orange envelope from his hand, and tore it open :

“Quite safe and happy don’t worry writing best love C.”

“No answer,” she said faintly to the waiting boy, still staring at the words before her.

Then slowly she closed the door and returned to the drawing-room, to her seat in the window.

So he was in London. He had been at Cannon Street Post Office at 2.45. He had evidently not lost his memory, unless it had forsaken him for a short time when he left Mrs. Sutherland’s house, and returned to him on his arrival in town. But if that were so, and if he were sufficiently recovered to know where he lived, why on earth did he not come himself instead of sending a telegram? He did not even say what he was doing in town, nor when he intended to return, and Amy, as she read

the paper over and over again, could make neither head nor tail of it. At any rate it was a clue, something to go on with, and she hoped that the fact of Kit sending no address indicated that he meant to stay at his club, which was the only place she had ever known him to stay at when in town. Obviously there was some reason, or he thought there was, for remaining away over night, but what it could be was impossible to guess. Perhaps his letter would throw some light on the mystery, and until it arrived she decided to wait with what patience she could muster.

All at once she remembered the telephone, and quick as thought she rose and rang up her husband's club number.

No, Mr. Brown had not been seen there that day, and they regretted that if he should put in an appearance they could not undertake to retain him in custody till his wife called for him.

With a helpless sigh Amy rang up the bank and inquired whether her husband had called there.

The bank was more encouraging. Mr. Brown had been there about one o'clock and appeared to be, so far as they were able to judge, in excellent health and spirits.

As Amy hung up the receiver, Watts entered the house with a full and detailed account of his proceedings at the police station and of his interview with the doctor. He was not at all surprised at the telegram; it only went to confirm his already

fixed opinion that Mr. Brown had returned to his former haunts.

"The best thing I can do," he advised, "is to nip orf up to town and wait outside the club till I see 'im. Becos he's bound to go there sooner or later, 'e 'as no luggage and they won't let 'im in no 'otel without it."

"Perhaps you'd better," said Amy. "Go and have your dinner first—you must be hungry—and I will write a letter to the club secretary explaining things a little, or they won't help you, I know. You must try and get hold of him before he enters the club, then call a taxi and bring him straight home. But, if he reaches the club before you do, ask to see the secretary and give him my note, and if they still won't do anything send me a wire at once and I'll go up myself and perhaps take the doctor with me. At any rate, don't lose sight of him for an instant, and do all you possibly can to get him back, for I shan't sleep a wink unless I know he's safe."

"All right, 'm," said Watts, "you may rely upon me; I'll do my best. The doctor told me to tell you that you was not to upset yourself; he says Mr. Brown is quite able to take care of himself, and he's bound to come home again before long. But 'e says once you've got 'im here we must keep a sharper look out on him, in the future, if you take my meaning?"

"Quite," said Amy hopelessly. "I've thought of that myself."

. . . . .

So Watts went up to town ; but, as we know, it was not such an easy matter to catch the runaway. While his keeper was watching away the weary hours outside the club door, Kit was dining in peace and comfort in the grill-room of one of the best hotels, and later was disporting himself joyously on the promenade of a most entertaining music hall not more than a few hundred yards from where his would-be captor awaited him.

The club secretary had not received Amy's note with any great show of cordiality, and Watts felt that if once his victim managed to get inside the portals of the club-house there would be small chance of getting him out again that night. He therefore criticized very carefully every one who passed up the steps and kept an anxious look out up and down the street in both directions, while at the same time effacing himself as far as possible in case the sight of him should frighten his quarry away.

It was rather disheartening after the exercise of so much zeal and such drastic precautions that he was obliged to go back to Uppington by the last train empty-handed, and he reflected, as he lay back half asleep in the corner of his third-class carriage, that if there was going to be much more of it, he would seek another billet where the gent needed less exacting supervision and he could get to bed at a reasonable hour of the night.

He did not see reason to change his mind when he returned to Elm Villa, for Mrs. Brown was, if anything, more depressed than he was himself.



She could not restrain a few tears when she saw him return alone and heard his account of the evening's work. It seemed certain that her husband was not at the club, and if he were not there she trembled to think where he might be.

At last, however, observing the hardly suppressed yawns of the weary Watts, she went off to her room, leaving him to have his supper and retire to the dining-room sofa where he proposed to spend the night, so that he might be at hand should Kit take it into his head to return home during the night.

The next morning when Amy awoke, after a fitful night's rest, her first thought was for the postman. She could hardly wait till she heard his knock, and was just on the point of getting out of bed to fetch the longed-for letter herself, when Mabel, from whom nothing was hid, rushed up the stairs with it, two at a time.

In silent sympathy she stood by the bed while her mistress took it from her hands and tore open the seal. It was a long letter, written on several half-sheets of paper, and a perplexed furrow grew in Amy's brow as she mastered its contents.

This is what she read :

"MY DEAR AMY, I suppose by the time you receive this you will know *all*. I thought it better under the circumstances to come up to town till things calm down a little, because in the heat of the moment we might both say things which we should afterwards regret, and perhaps wreck both

our lives over this unhappy affair. I do not of course know what version those two have given you, but please remember, Amy, there are two sides to every question, and you have not yet heard mine. I am not as you know a man to make accusations against a woman, however much she may deserve them, so I will pass over Lebah's conduct without a word. The less said about her the better, women of that sort are a public danger, and I am only thankful that I managed to escape out of her clutches before it was too late. But I must seriously warn you against Captain Vibart : he is utterly unscrupulous and untrustworthy in every way ; don't believe a word he tells you, as he hates me like poison, but not more than I hate him.

" Perhaps I have been wrong in keeping the facts of the case so long from you, but I can only say that I have acted throughout entirely in your interests. In order to spare you anxiety, I have allowed myself to be cruelly misunderstood and misjudged. You will never know what I have suffered the last fortnight, or what my feelings have been under your treatment of me. I know, Amy dear, you have done it all for the best, and I do not blame you in the least, but it is only fair to remind you that if you had listened to what I kept on telling you, we should have had none of this bother, or very little. However, what is done cannot be undone, and I am quite ready to forgive and forget the past if you are. I hope, darling, now that you have heard my side of the story, you will not judge me too harshly, and

that you will at once write me a nice letter saying that you still love your—foolish perhaps, but always devoted,  
KIT.

“ Better wire me to the club, and I will go back home when I know everything is all right. I hope you didn't give them the £20. C. B.”

## CHAPTER XIX

CHRISTOPHER'S letter, although it shed very little light upon the reason of his sudden departure or his present whereabouts, had a very decided effect upon his wife. As she read it over again to herself after Mabel had left the room, some instinct seemed to tell her that here at last was the truth, or at any rate part of it. She could only dimly conjecture what lay behind it all, but she recognized the unmistakable touch of Kit as she knew him best, in every line of this characteristic letter. Whether it was the ravings of a disordered mind, or whether it half revealed a deep-laid and abominable plot in which the fascinating Captain Vibart was incredibly implicated, she could not determine; but, whatever the real meaning of it might be, she resolved to make a desperate effort to get to the bottom of the whole affair without any further delay. It was almost too much to hope that she would be able to discover anything, which would entirely account for her husband's extraordinary behaviour of the last few weeks, and yet Kit's denunciation of Vibart and Lebah was so emphatic that it was impossible to ignore it, even if his grievances against them turned out to be purely imaginary.

Mrs. Sutherland had informed her over the telephone on the previous afternoon of the circumstances of Kit's flight, of his evident perturbation at the sight of Captain Vibart, who had called in passing to introduce his newly married wife, and of her own distress at being the means of allowing him to escape. But Mrs. Vibart's Christian name had naturally not been mentioned, and Amy found it difficult to believe that Captain Vibart's new wife and the Lebah of the discovered handkerchief were one and the same person.

She decided, however, that she would, by some means or another, see the lady for herself and form her own opinion of her complicity in Kit's affairs before saying anything to Mrs. Sutherland, which might cause a family disagreement, or involve the asking of awkward questions on either side.

Her active little mind worked more rapidly than usual as she lay in her big bed trying to think what would be the best thing for her to do ; and eventually she decided to let Mabel ask on the telephone for Captain Vibart's address. It was most unlikely that Mrs. Sutherland would be up at that early hour, and if a maid answered the call there would be no possibility of entering into any explanation as to why it was wanted.

This seemed to clear the way a little, and Amy sprang out of bed and began to dress hastily.

By the time she was ready to go downstairs, Mabel came up to her with the message that Captain Vibart was staying at the Grand Hotel in Coventry



Street, but that he proposed leaving for Paris very shortly.

"Thank you, Mabel," said Amy. "I am going up to town this morning. Will you see about lunch for me? The cold mutton will do for the kitchen, and please get a little fish for the children's dinner."

"Yes, 'm, and shall you be back for dinner?"

"I expect so," replied Amy. "You'd better order a small joint of beef, probably the master will return with me."

"Have they got 'im, then?" inquired Mabel, unable to restrain her very human curiosity any longer.

"I had a letter from him this morning," answered Amy cautiously. "I think he will be home to dinner—at any rate order the beef. And, Mabel, you have that address, if any wires or messages come for me, or if the master should return while I am gone, telephone to me to the Grand Hotel; you'll find the number in the book."

"Yes, 'm," replied Mabel, who would dearly have loved to ask a few questions, but who was a properly conducted girl and knew her place.

After breakfast, Watts was instructed to go up again to town and take his stand outside the club premises.

"I shall send my husband a wire this morning," said Mrs. Brown, "and some time during the day he will call and get it. Don't let him see

you, but wait till he comes out of the door, and then just follow him quietly. I expect he will come straight home; but, if he should not, be careful not to let him out of your sight, and let me know as soon as you can where he is. I shall be back here by lunch-time, or soon after, and you can either 'phone or wire me, whichever is most convenient."

"Very good, 'm," replied Watts without much enthusiasm. "I'll do my best, but supposin' 'e don't seem like coming 'ome, wouldn't you like me to try and 'tice 'im back? 'E's very easily managed is Mr. Brown, if you go the right way to work."

"Well, use your own judgment, Watts," said Amy. "I am almost certain that after he receives my telegram he will return of his own accord. The great thing is to know where he is staying and not to arouse his suspicions, because if he doesn't come home we shall have to take some means to make him, and you could do nothing with him alone. If he thinks you are watching him, he may dodge you and go off somewhere else, and we should lose him again."

"You may depend upon me," said Watts. "I'll manage 'im, never fear, once I get a hold of 'im."

Having made all arrangements at home, kissed the babies, and instructed Nurse where they were to be taken for their walk, Amy set off to catch the five minutes past nine train. Very fresh and pretty she looked in her neat tailor-made

suit with a hat and feather-boá of periwinkle blue to match her eyes. All the doubts and forebodings of the previous night had disappeared, and she walked briskly along with her head held high and an expression of courage and resolve on her little pink face.

At a quarter-past ten o'clock, Jack and Lebah were just finishing breakfast in their private sitting-room at the Grand Hotel. The morning sun glistened on the silver appointments of the table and a warm fragrance pervaded the room. Huge bowls of flowers lent a festive air to the occasion, and Lebah herself in a shell-pink negligé, with her hair tied carelessly by a bow of the same colour, was quite in keeping with the luxuriousness of her surroundings.

After a discreet knock at the door, a man-servant entered and handed a card on a tray to Captain Vibart.

Jack took it from him and scrutinized it carefully.

"Mrs. Christopher Brown," he read out, "Elm Villa, Uppington. Third Tuesday."

"Now we're in for it, Lebah."

Lebah shrugged her shoulders, in a way she had learned in Paris, and smiled lazily at her husband.

"I daresay the hall porter will help you out if you give him a nice tip," she suggested.

"No, I shan't do that," said Jack. "She'd only catch me on the way out and make a scene in

the hall." Then turning to the man, standing impassively by his side, he added: "Show the lady up here, please, in about five minutes."

"Very good, sir. Shall I take away the breakfast things?"

"No, don't bother," said Jack.

As the door closed he turned again to his wife.

"It's you she wants to see," he said. "She has heard of your goings on with her husband and she means to have your back hair off. You had better get dressed, unless you are going to see her in that thing."

"I don't intend to see her at all," replied Lebah carelessly. "What on earth could I say to her if I did? I could only tell her that her husband had been crazy about me, and tried to make me elope with him, and I don't suppose she'd thank me for that. I'd better keep out of it altogether, and you must let me down as easily as you can. Heaven only knows what he's said about me."

Jack stared at his wife in amazement.

"Haven't you got any conscience at all?" he asked. "I'll blot Brown out for you any time you like, but for goodness' sake don't ask me to tackle his wife!"

"Evidently," continued Lebah serenely, "the sight of us yesterday upset the apple cart. I suppose he thought I'd turned up to claim my handkerchief, and got in a blue funk and shot off home to get his own story in first. I can just see him!" she laughed softly, showing all her glistening white teeth.

"The only thing is," she added, "how much has he told her? I expect he's said a good deal more about your cowardly and brutal attack upon him than about his own feelings for me. Anyhow, the card was brought up to you, not to me. I'll bet you it's you she's after."

"Even if she is," returned Jack, "I always understood that the first duty of a good wife is to interview the people whom her husband doesn't wish to see. I shouldn't like you to neglect your duties so early in the proceedings as this, Lebah, —I believe in making a good start, anyhow."

"No use, old dear," laughed Lebah, rising from the table. "I'm going back to bed till it's all over. Be careful what you say, everything will go straight back to your aunt, and I don't want your family to think me worse than I really am."

"Oh, blow the family!" said Jack crossly, "and curse that infernal dressing-gown. If I hadn't bought that, I should never have gone to Uppington at all."

"Nor to Brighton either," Lebah reminded him.

"No," growled Jack pessimistically, "I should still be a bachelor without a care in the world. I warned you what marriage was, and here you are: we haven't been married a week before we are up to our necks in it!"

"Poor lamb," said Lebah lightly. "Anyhow, just see this through for me, and if there's going to be any more bother about it, we'll skip off to Paris to-morrow and let 'em all dry up and bust."



"Well, I suppose if you won't see her," said Jack dejectedly, "I must. Thank the Lord she's not an ugly woman or I should be no use at all."

As he spoke a gentle tap was heard at the door; and, Lebah quickly snatching up the morning paper, fled with a soft silken rush into the adjoining bedroom, silently closing the door after her.

"Come in," called out Jack, hastily lighting a cigarette to make himself feel more at home.

The door opened and Amy Brown stood on the threshold, hesitating a moment as she saw that Captain Vibart was still at the breakfast-table.

"How do you do?" said Jack, rising hospitably. "Have you had breakfast?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Have some more?"

"No, thank you."

"Well, do sit down, won't you?"

"Thank you," said Amy, taking the most uncomfortable chair in the room and seating herself remotely on the extreme edge of it. "I hope I'm not too early. I . . . I wanted to catch you before you left the hotel."

"Quite," said Jack, "not at all."

He intended to be very wary till he saw how the land lay and just how much it would be necessary to say.

Amy looked up into his face with a pathetic and trustful little smile.

"I suppose you know that Kit ran away yesterday?"

"No, I didn't," said Jack. "I thought he'd gone home."

"No," said Amy, "he went up to town, and I had a wire from him telling me not to worry, and . . . and this morning he wrote me a letter."

She paused and rested her eyes limply on Jack in a way that made him feel almost uncomfortable, but he maintained a pleasant air of unconcern and met her gaze with composure.

"You see," began Mrs. Brown, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but it is so tremendously important to me. I must try and find out if what he says is true, or whether it's all his imagination."

"Quite," said Jack evasively.

"Do you mind telling me," asked Amy, "what your wife's Christian name is?"

"Not in the least," answered Jack readily. "Her name is Lebah."

Amy regarded him steadily.

"I thought so," she remarked with deep meaning in her voice. "May I see her, I think she can tell me a great deal I want to know?"

Jack thought this was quite possible, but refrained from saying so.

"I'm afraid she's not up yet," he replied genially. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Well, I daresay you could tell me," began Amy doubtfully.

"You see," said Jack hastily, "my position is this: I should like immensely to help you in

any way that I can, but don't you know, I can't very well give away other people's secrets without their permission. You quite see that, don't you?"

"I don't want you to," said Amy simply, "all I want to ask you is: Did you know my husband before the day you saw him at our house?"

"There you are, you see," said Jack helplessly. "However, I can't be expected to perjure my immortal soul. Yes, I did. At least, I had just met him once."

Amy stared reproachfully at him.

"Why did you pretend you didn't know him?"

"The fact is," said Jack, somewhat uneasy under her direct gaze, "I thought he'd rather I didn't recognize him."

"But why should you think that?" demanded Amy incredulously. "He made no secret about knowing you, he recognized you the minute he saw you!"

Jack jerked himself impatiently out of his chair and stood with his back to the fire facing her, heartily wishing himself somewhere else.

"Very well, then," he said, "if you will have it: Brown and I had a bit of a scrap the night before; and, as you had just been telling us that he had lost his memory and remembered nothing about it, I thought the best thing I could do was to back him up. Of course I had no idea it was his house, or I never would have

gone in with my aunt ; the whole thing was most unfortunate."

Amy's mind was working rapidly.

"Then it *was* you who knocked him down and cut his head open?" she said at length, her blue eyes growing harder every minute. "He told me you had, but I wouldn't believe him."

"Not intentionally," said Jack, "he fell down as I was going to catch hold of him and hit his head on the fender."

"What fender?" asked Amy in bewilderment. "Where did all this happen?"

"In . . . in my wife's flat in Shaftesbury Avenue," replied Jack patiently, looking a good deal more bored than he felt.

"What time was it?" pursued Amy relentlessly.

"About eleven-thirty, I suppose."

"But whatever was Kit doing there at that time of night? Did he know your wife too?"

"Oh yes," said Jack easily, "he just looked in after the theatre; she was on the stage, you know."

"I see," breathed Amy slowly, "that's why he didn't tell me — he knows I can't bear actresses."

Her eyes wore a troubled and anxious expression as she turned them again on Jack.

"What . . . what did you quarrel about?" she inquired with nervous hesitation. She looked exactly like a child in distress over a broken doll, and Vibart felt suddenly quite sorry for her.

"You see," he began with an air of extreme

candour, "I suppose I'm the most jealous brute under the sun. I mean, when I'm roused, there's positively no stopping me."

"And were you jealous of Kit?" asked Amy in amazement.

"Furiously," said Jack, "that's the way I'm made. I don't mind telling you this is not the first time my hideous jealousy has got me into trouble."

"Oh, but he didn't mean anything," said Amy earnestly, "he never does. You don't understand Kit; he always goes on like that."

"Then he'll get his head punched one of these days," remarked Jack bitterly, "it's a wonder I didn't do it for him that night, I was in a homicidal rage."

"Even if you were," said Amy resentfully, "you had no business to strike my husband: you must have given him a fearful blow to knock him down like that."

"I couldn't help him falling down," said Jack impatiently, "it was all his own fault. Anyhow, I helped him downstairs and put him into a taxi . . . I mean I did all I possibly could for him."

"But why couldn't he look after himself?" demanded Amy with a puzzled frown. "What was the matter with him? Was he unconscious?"

"Oh no," said Jack. "Do you see by that time he was half-drunk; he didn't have much, but his head isn't any too strong."

Amy flared up in an instant.



"I don't believe it!" she cried. "Kit has never been drunk in his life. I don't believe a word you say. Evidently you're trying to hush up something you're ashamed of. From the very first you've deceived me and told me lies; I think your conduct is simply disgraceful!"

"I say . . . you know . . ." began Jack.

But he was not allowed to get any further. Amy was now thoroughly roused. Her usually tender blue eyes were hard as flints, ready to drill holes in the man who had dared to malign her husband.

"I see now that Kit was perfectly right," she stormed. "He said you were an unscrupulous man, and so you are; I never thought anyone could be so heartless and wicked! You stood there and allowed us all to think Kit mad, and not a word would you say in case your own miserable story leaked out. He might have been put in a lunatic asylum for the rest of his life, and you would not have lifted a finger to save him!"

Jack looked steadily at her little flushed face, and a whimsical smile played round the corners of his thin lips.

"I say," he protested, "you know you thoroughly unnerve me when you get in such a temper. If you go for Kit like this, I don't wonder he's run away."

"I don't think it's at all a laughing matter, Captain Vibart," replied Amy with dignity. "My husband has been put in a very serious position, and it's due in a great measure to you. I know Kit

is sometimes foolish, and easily led away—he's too trusting and good-natured—but he's the soul of honour, and you must have had some very extraordinary hold over him to make him behave as he has done lately."

"Not at all," said Jack, "it was entirely his own idea."

"But why should he be so anxious to hush up everything?" asked Amy. "Had he been doing anything disgraceful?"

"No . . . not so far as I know . . . in fact," added Jack hastily, "I'm quite sure he hadn't. I'll take my oath of that."

"Then it must have been to shield you," said Amy with instant conviction. "As soon as he saw that you didn't want him to recognize you, he allowed us all to think he was mad rather than denounce you before your aunt. The poor noble darling! How foolish of him! and when he tried to tell me about it afterwards I wouldn't listen." Her eyes filled with ready tears. "I can't think how I have been so blind; and it's all your fault. I shall never forgive you—never!"

"For heaven's sake, don't cry," said Jack in agitation.

"I'm not going to," returned Amy with spirit; "it was just the thought of all my poor Kit has suffered that upset me for the moment."

She rose and prepared to take her departure.

"Look here," said Jack, "you know I'm so sorry. I don't want you to go away feeling I've

treated your husband badly. On my honour I haven't in the least."

"Opinions differ about honour, perhaps," replied Amy stiffly. "I don't know whether you call it honourable to beguile an innocent man into your house and knock him senseless on the floor, and afterwards to let every one think him mad rather than confess what you had done."

"No," admitted Jack gloomily, "it certainly does sound a bit off; doesn't it?"

"As for his being drunk," continued Amy severely, "I think that was a perfectly odious thing to say—so spiteful and so utterly untrue. It's much more likely you were drunk yourself, and didn't know what you were doing."

Jack regarded her solemnly for several seconds in silence.

"You know, Mrs. Brown," he said at length with profound conviction, "you really are the absolute limit. You've got me done to a frazzle. I only hope I don't look such a pathetic worm as I feel."

"I dare say you can't help yourself," said Amy, relenting a little. "Kit is quite as much to blame as you are, for getting mixed up with such a fast set. I suppose it was because I wasn't there to look after him."

"I shouldn't be too down on him if I were you," said Jack. "He's an awful ass, but I don't think there's much vice in him."

"I know there isn't," said Amy confidently. "It's his kind heart that's got him into this fix."

I can see now," she added, after a pause, "why he wanted to be a Christian Scientist. Poor old darling!"

"That's another thing," said Jack, suddenly remembering the instructions, which Lebah had given him. "I can see I shall look rather a lurid sort of fool if you're going to tell my aunt all about it. Considering the way you've had me on the mat for the last half-hour, you might let it go at that, don't you think?"

"Of course," agreed Amy readily, "I don't want your aunt to know anything about it; it would soon be all over Uppington, and I'd sooner people thought Kit had suffered from nervous breakdown than that he had left me to . . . to flirt with an actress."

"I shouldn't take that part of it too seriously if I were you," advised Jack tactfully. "After all, there's not much harm in flirting is there?"

"N . . . no . . ." said Amy reluctantly. "I suppose men drift into it without meaning to."

"Nothing easier," said Jack with conviction. "One glance from you would set me off at any moment."

Amy involuntarily raised her eyes with a sudden smile at this unexpected and audacious remark.

"Yes, that's the way," laughed Jack. "I see you know all about it."

Amy made a heroic and quite visible effort to control her features into a more sedate expression, But Jack's smile was very infectious and she found

it a difficult matter to look as severe as she felt she ought to do.

"I really think I must go now," she said, rising with a great show of determination.

"Must you really?" said Jack, holding out with some ostentation a lean, brown hand.

Amy looked at it, and after a slight pause laid her own small white gloved hand within it.

Whereupon Jack, taking a mean and quite indefensible advantage of his superior strength, clasped it firmly in his own and fixed his green eyes upon her in an ardent and compelling glance.

"Do you hate me very much?" he inquired impressively.

"Yes, I do," returned Amy promptly, but the corners of her mouth curved into delicious little dimples.

"The feeling is not at all reciprocal," murmured Jack suggestively, looking down at the little captive hand, and back again into her face.

There was a tiny pause, and then Amy did a most extraordinary thing. What possessed her she could never afterwards made out, for, as Jack gazed at her hand, she raised it ever so slightly towards him and rested her limpid blue eyes for one provocative moment on his.

And Jack, seizing with alacrity on her friendly impulse, lifted her fingers to his lips and impressed a kiss upon them with an enthusiasm that gave her a most unexpected thrill and caused a vivid blush to mount to her cheeks. Never had such a romantic thing happened to her before.



"So now, we're friends," said Jack, releasing her hand. And Amy smiled half shyly up into his face.

"All the same," she said, "I don't approve of you in the least."

"Never mind," replied Jack, with cheerful philosophy. "You're a little brick, and you've got your head screwed on the right way."

## CHAPTER XX

WHEN Kit awoke on the morning after his escapade, he stretched himself luxuriously and looked round his little bare bedroom with a smile of intense satisfaction. It was so good to be free and unfettered again, to be rid of the haunting presence of Watts, and away from the anxious solicitation of his wife. He felt so buoyant and fit that it was for once a distinct pleasure to get out of bed, and he hummed cheerfully to himself as he padded across the room in the now crumpled pink pyjamas, to pull up the blinds and have a look at the weather.

It was a bright autumn morning, with just enough crispness in the air to make it invigorating, and Kit, as he opened the window a little way, heaved a deep and thankful sigh from the bottom of his heart.

He wondered what Amy would say when she read his letter, and how long it would be before she replied to it; not, probably, before eleven o'clock, which would give him ample time to go into the city and carry out a certain scheme, which he had in view.

He dressed quickly, and descending to the hotel

dining-room made an excellent breakfast of grilled herrings, followed by kidneys and bacon. After which he read the morning paper and chatted pleasantly with the head waiter on the topics of the day, then, feeling thoroughly contented with himself and with life generally, he betook himself to the city to pay a call on the head of his firm.

Brown Senior was a shipping merchant in the North of England, and Brown Junior held a good position in a similar business in London by reason of his father's influence ; he had therefore never had any great anxiety about the possibility of losing his billet, but he felt that certain explanations would naturally be expected from him to account for his long absence from work. He conned over in his mind what form these should take, and wished that he knew exactly what Amy had said about him in her letter to the office the day after his accident. It was foolish of her to send it without first showing it to him, but he knew how clever and discreet she had always been in the few business matters with which she had been connected, and he felt quite confident that she would be careful to say nothing which might prejudice his position in any way. It was therefore with a light heart that he entered the building where he was accustomed to spend the greater part of his time, and sent up a request for an interview with Mr. Blair, the head of the business.

But when after a wait of nearly half an hour he was shown into the chilly and severely furnished apartment sacred to the use of Mr. Blair, and he saw

before him that very precise and dignified little gentleman, his spirits unaccountably dropped much lower, and he felt creeping over him a sort of guilty abasement, which reminded him of the days when he had shivered in the study of the headmaster at school.

Mr. Blair eyed him with some curiosity.

"Ha, Brown," he began patronizingly, "you've come back, have you . . . you've returned?"

"Yes, sir," replied Kit, with engaging politeness. "I hope to return to work to-morrow morning, but I thought I should first like to see you personally, and explain the reason of my absence. I was very sorry to have to leave so suddenly; I hope it didn't inconvenience you at all?"

"No, thank you, Brown, not much," said Mr. Blair precisely. "I understand from your wife that you had . . . er . . . an accident?"

"Only a slight one," Kit assured him, "in fact, nothing at all really. I shouldn't have stayed away from the office for that. But I've been suffering a good deal from nerves lately, insomnia, and so on, and my doctor practically insisted on a complete rest for a week or two. He said that unless I took care of myself I might become very seriously ill, and I felt it was better to take a short rest now, than perhaps to be laid up later on for two or three months, that was my idea."

"Quite so," said Mr. Blair doubtfully. Then, looking suddenly at Kit through his gold-rimmed spectacles, he added:

"I suppose you know that I have been in communication with your doctor?"

"No, have you really?" said Kit, rather taken aback by this totally unexpected announcement.

"I have," replied Mr. Blair drily, "he said nothing about an accident, nothing about nerves or insomnia."

"Indeed?" said Kit uneasily. "May I ask you what he told you?"

"Quite frankly, Brown, he told me that . . . er . . . that your mind was affected. I am sure it must be a very painful subject for you. I must admit that I was very surprised to hear it."

Kit stared straight in front of him and said nothing.

"When I received Mrs. Brown's letter," continued Mr. Blair smoothly, "I thought it would be more satisfactory to hear what the doctor had to say about your condition, and I therefore asked your wife's permission to write and consult him about you."

"I'm sorry you did that," said Kit truthfully. "I consider Bennett is an absolute fool; he doesn't know in the least what he's talking about."

"He appears to stand well in his profession," remarked Mr. Blair; "he wrote me a very intelligent letter, a very kind letter, I thought."

"Well, sir, I can assure you," said Kit earnestly, "that he was quite wrong about me, absolutely."



"Is it a fact," pursued Mr. Blair, "that you were obliged to be put under the control of . . . er . . . a keeper?"

"Certainly not," retorted Kit indignantly, "that is, I did have a manservant in the house, because the doctor so alarmed my wife that I thought it only right to do so."

"I see," said Mr. Blair. "And when did the servant leave you?"

"Actually," said Kit, "he hasn't left me yet . . . I mean . . . he's a useful sort of chap and I'm keeping him on."

Mr. Blair regarded him thoughtfully.

"Does your doctor know that you intend returning to work?" he inquired.

"Not yet, he doesn't," said Kit. "I shall probably write him a note this evening."

"Did you tell your wife you were coming here this morning?"

"No," said Kit uncomfortably, "I didn't. I shall tell her when I go home of course."

"In fact," proceeded Mr. Blair kindly, "you came here entirely on your own account without consulting anyone as to whether you were in a fit condition to return or not,—is that it?"

"I think," protested Kit mildly, "that I'm the best judge of whether I feel able to do my work or not."

"M . . . M . . . yes." Mr. Blair appeared to be thinking deeply.

"Just stay here, Brown, a few minutes, will you? I should like to continue this conversa-

tion, but there is a small matter of business to which I must attend for the moment. I shall not keep you long. You will find the morning paper on that table if you care to look at it while I am away."

He slipped out of the room, closing the door after him, and very gently and silently turning the key in the lock as he did so.

It took him quite a short time to ring up Dr. Bennett on the telephone and ascertain that Brown had escaped from custody only the day before, and that an anxious search was being prosecuted in all directions for his recovery.

"Exactly what I suspected," said Mr. Blair, "he has a most extraordinarily shifty and peculiar appearance. What do you advise me to do about him? He is at present locked in my room. I should be very much obliged if you could make it convenient to come up to town and look after him."

Dr. Bennett thought he might manage it, and advised Mr. Blair to keep the captive under control, and to avoid if possible exciting his suspicions in case he should prove troublesome. His motor was waiting at the door to take him on his rounds, and he promised to be at the office in about an hour.

So Mr. Blair, albeit with some trepidation at his heart, returned to his private room, not, however, without having first summoned a reliable clerk and confided to him the sad story of poor Brown.

"I want you to take him," he said, "to his accustomed seat and give him something to

do ; anything so long as he is kept employed. Don't on any account let him out of your sight ; and, if any sort of difficulty arises, send for me at once."

" Yes, sir," replied the clerk, looking forward with pleasurable anticipation to a more interesting morning's work than usually fell to his lot.

It was explained to Kit that, there being a great deal of work in hand that day, Mr. Blair would consider it a favour if he would take his place at once and do his share of it : a proposal to which Kit, all unconscious of his fate, assented with alacrity.

Meanwhile Amy, having said good-bye to Captain Vibart, hurried off across the road to the post office to send the following wire to her husband :

" Seen Vibart everything explained come home longing to see you best love Amy."

It came, with the address, to a little more than sixpence, but Amy was so delighted to be able to send it at all that she hardly minded exceeding her usual limit. Nor could she quite see how to reduce it to twelve words without leaving out something important. She was very anxious to be as cordial as possible in order that Kit might feel entirely reassured about his reception, and she reflected that any strictures which she might feel called upon to make about his behaviour could be very well postponed until she got him safely home again. She was convinced that directly

Kit received her message he would go straight back to her, and that before long they would be as happy and united a family as they had been before the summer holidays.

As she left the post office she remembered her instructions to Mabel, and, although she thought there had been no time for either Watts to communicate with her or for her husband to return home, to make quite sure, she crossed again to the hotel and inquired from the hall porter if any message had been received for Mrs. Brown. And the porter, who had his living to earn like everybody else, made an ostentatiously laborious pilgrimage to the cashier's office and returned with a neat slip of paper on which was written a rather incoherent message from Mabel. Unfortunately Amy was so disturbed by what she read there that she quite forgot to tip the man for his trouble in walking all the way across the hall, and she rushed out of the hotel door followed by a look of such ineffable disdain that it would have cut her to the heart had she been able to see it.

Mabel said that Dr. Bennett had just called with news of her master, and was on his way to the office to see Mr. Blair, and would be obliged if Mrs. Brown would meet him there as soon as possible.

Wondering anxiously what new development had brought the doctor hurrying up to town on such short notice, Amy hailed a taxi, and in less than a quarter of an hour was deposited at the door of the city office, and had sent up her card to Mr. Blair. She was aware of curious and furtive

glances as she waited for a few minutes in the outer office, and the clerk who asked her to kindly step this way did so in hushed and commiserating tones, which roused a distinct tremor of apprehension in her breast. But she had little time to indulge in speculation as she followed him quickly through the building, to the room at the back, which the head of the firm used as his particular sanctum.

As she entered the room the doctor and Mr. Blair rose at once to greet her, one with an air of portentous gravity befitting a funeral, and the other with the same familiar and kindly smile that had so often brought comfort to her heart. Not till she had shaken hands with each of them did she catch sight of her husband sitting on a chair by the wall, his face a study of conflicting emotions of apparently a very unpleasing nature.

Amy turned to him with a glad and welcome smile.

"Oh, *here* you are!" she exclaimed delightedly.

"Yes," replied Kit, with profound melancholy, "here I am, worse luck."

"He came to see me this morning," explained Mr. Blair, "and I took the liberty of ringing up your family physician."

"I called on you," said Dr. Bennett to Amy, "on my way. I should like to have had a little chat with you before. However, I was just explaining to your husband that we can't allow you to be put to all this anxiety any longer, we shall have you laid up next. I was going to suggest, that instead of his returning



home to-day, he should go with me to an extremely nice nursing home, kept by a man I know rather well. I really don't think it's wise for him to go back to Uppington under the circumstances; you see Watts has practically no control over him as things are at present."

Amy looked troubled.

"I don't think I quite like that idea," she began.

"Neither do I," added Kit hastily. "I think it's a loathsome idea. In fact I absolutely refuse to go into any kind of a nursing home at all, it's only another name for a lunatic asylum, and once I got inside I don't suppose I should ever get out again."

"I certainly think," suggested Mr. Blair, "that before any such drastic step is taken Mr. Brown should consult a good mental specialist. I understand," he added, turning politely to the doctor, "that is also your opinion?"

"Quite," replied Dr. Bennett. "I've all along been trying to persuade him to see a good man. I've not specialized in mental cases myself, although I've done a great deal in that line one way and another. Personally I think, and I've said so from the first, that with proper care and treatment any serious development may be averted. There are undoubtedly symptoms of mental disorder, but exactly how far the mind is affected I should not care to say. I'll tell you what, Brown, suppose you go with me this morning and see Austen Temple—he's about the best authority on

the brain of the present day—and, as I know him fairly well, he will perhaps see us without an appointment.”

Kit cast a furtive and anxious glance at his wife, as if to see what help might be expected in that direction. But it was not easy to judge from Amy's face what she was thinking about, and in truth her thoughts were of a very perplexed and confused description. She must, she realized, save her husband by hook or by crook from being committed to a lunatic asylum, but just on the spur of the moment it was difficult to see how this could be done without explaining the whole circumstances to the two other men, which for Kit's sake she wished to avoid if possible.

However, something must certainly be said to clear up the situation, and she undoubtedly was the right person to say it. The knowledge that so much depended upon her inspired her with a feeling of courage and responsibility, and she turned to the doctor with quite a little air of authority :

“I don't think we shall need to consult a specialist. I've found out the owner of that handkerchief.”

“Really !” exclaimed the doctor eagerly, “that's capital. Who is she ?”

“You remember,” continued Amy, with composure, “that Captain Vibart who called with Mrs. Sutherland at our house ?”

“Perfectly ; yes ?”

“She's his wife !”

"No!" exclaimed the doctor in amazement.

Kit was also amazed, a good deal more so than the doctor, but he was learning discretion and had the sense to hold his tongue, reflecting that Amy was getting on very well without his assistance.

"Yes," pursued Amy. "I found out the whole thing, and it's perfectly true all that Kit said. Captain Vibart knocked him down on the night before, and cut his head open, and then when he was still unconscious he put him in a taxi and sent him home. Did you ever hear of anything more scandalous and heartless? And to stand there and let us all think Kit was mad rather than admit what he had done. I think it's the most heartless thing I ever heard of!"

The doctor looked very puzzled. "What made him go to the house, then, if he knew your husband and didn't want to be recognized?"

"Of course," said Amy, "that was the extraordinary part of it. He didn't know that Kit lived here, he just happened to call with his aunt and he was awfully surprised to see Kit walk into the dining-room."

"But Great Scotland Yard!" exclaimed the doctor, turning to Kit, "if that was so, why on earth didn't you say so at the time?"

"I did say so," replied Kit, his spirits somewhat revived at Amy's masterly interpretation of his story. "Didn't I call him a scoundrel the moment I saw him sitting there, and ordered him to clear out of the house?"

"Yes, that's so," admitted the doctor, "but I'd have punched the fellow's head if I'd been in your place."

"Just what I was going to do," said Kit, "when you came along with the gardener and stopped me."

But the doctor was not satisfied by any means. He wanted to know a great deal more.

"And about the loss of memory, then?" he asked. "When did it all come back to you—this is the first I've heard of it."

"Do you see," interposed Amy hastily and with an engaging air of simplicity, "he didn't exactly lose his memory, not in the way we thought he had: he just wanted to try and forget all about it. Although they had treated him so badly, he wouldn't give them away or make a fuss like most men would have done. That's Kit's greatest fault: he's too easy-going and good-natured."

"It's all very well to be good-natured," replied the doctor, "but I can't understand why, when he saw the hole it was getting him into, he didn't explain what had happened—at any rate he might have told you, there would have been no need for it to have gone any farther."

"He did tell me," said Amy earnestly, "he kept on telling me all the time, over and over again, and I wouldn't believe him. You see, we were so certain that his mind was affected that I simply thought he was raving and took no notice."

"Most extraordinary," said the doctor dryly.

"I should like to see Vibart for myself and hear what he's got to say about it."

"They're just off to Paris," said Amy glibly, "I don't suppose you could see him now; but there's not the slightest doubt of what I've told you. He admitted everything. He said I made him feel like a worm. I was so angry that I don't know what I said to him."

The doctor turned again to Kit.

"Do you mean to say that you knew all the time who that handkerchief belonged to?" he demanded, fixing him with a critical stare.

"Certainly I did," replied Kit, with a great show of indifference.

"Then why, in the name of common sense, couldn't you say so?"

"Because I didn't wish to," replied Kit with dignity. "It was entirely a matter between Vibart and myself, and I didn't want to drag a lady's name into it."

"Why didn't you come straight to me and tell me the whole thing calmly from beginning to end, and so save yourself and everybody else all this bother and fuss?" demanded the doctor.

"Why should I?" demanded Kit reasonably. "It had nothing at all to do with you. I told you everything that there was any need for you to know, and you didn't believe me. You made up your mind that I was mad, and every word I spoke you twisted round somehow or other to prove yourself right. I told you till I was tired that there was nothing at all the matter with my



brain, and hang it all, if a chap likes to try and forget an unpleasant experience, surely he's at liberty to do so without every one hunting him into a lunatic asylum!"

The doctor regarded him with a peculiar and significant smile.

"Veryspecious argument," he remarked. "You're a queer bird, Brown. However, thanks to your wife you've escaped being locked up this time. Of course, if it hadn't been for your family history I don't suppose the idea would have occurred to anyone. But that sort of thing is so often hereditary that one is naturally on the look out for symptoms, which in ordinary people would perhaps pass unnoticed. . . ."

"What sort of thing?" demanded Kit, staring hard at him. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I understand your mother died in a lunatic asylum?"

"Certainly she did," replied Kit, "but that isn't to say that she was a lunatic. Where did you get that useful piece of information from?" he inquired with mild irony.

"I told him," said Amy quietly, "I thought he ought to know."

"But, *Amy*!" said Kit indignantly, "you know perfectly well that my mother was on a visit to the place, she and the doctor's wife were school pals; and she got typhoid and died before they could take her home. You've heard that story often enough."

"Yes," said Amy meekly, "but I didn't believe it; I thought you made it up so that people wouldn't know your mother had gone mad."

The doctor burst into a loud and boisterous peal of laughter, and Mr. Blair joined him with his thin, dry cackle. But Amy and Kit were staring solemnly into each other's eyes.

"I'm sorry, dear," said Amy humbly, gazing upward at her husband with pathetic appeal. "It's my fault, I'm really to blame for the whole thing—me and Captain Vibart."

"No, don't say that," replied Kit with magnanimity, laying his hand kindly on her shoulder. "We've all made mistakes, I think; we must forgive each other and forget all about them."

"Well, Brown, I congratulate you," said Mr. Blair, coming up with a cordial outstretched hand, "I'm sure you've behaved with exemplary patience and forbearance under very trying circumstances. From what I can learn, you have been most extraordinarily quixotic in your endeavour to shield this . . . er . . . gentleman from the consequences of his actions: but I like you none the less for that. There is far too little nowadays of that feeling of chivalry and honour between gentlemen which there was in my young days, and I am glad to see that it still exists, even if on this occasion it has given rise to certain unfortunate misunderstandings."

"Thank you, sir," replied Kit modestly, returning the friendly grip of his chief's hand; "it is very kind of you to say so, but I don't feel that

I ought to take any credit for having behaved as I did."

Dr. Bennett was regarding him with an amused twinkle in his eye.

"You take all you can get, old chap," he said dryly, "you deserve it. I consider you've displayed a good deal more acumen over this affair than I have. I only wish I had half your intellect."

Kit beamed with gratification.

"Never mind, doctor," he said affably. "I daresay you'll get your own back when you send in your bill."

"You bet I shall," laughed the doctor. "Well, I must be off home; can I offer you a lift?"

"No, thank you," replied Kit cheerfully. "Amy and I are going to celebrate the occasion with a bottle of fizz at Romano's. Isn't that so, Amy?"

And Amy dimpled all over her face in the sweetest way as she met her husband's eye in a look of mutual understanding such as had not passed between them for a very long time.

"Just tell me, Kitty darling," cooed Amy, when the bottle stood empty on the table, and the grateful odour of coffee mingled with the more subtle aroma of Benedictine, "did you really flirt with her?"

"It all depends on what you call flirting," answered Kit judiciously, cutting off the end of a large and expensive cigar. "I mean, a woman of

that type simply lives on admiration and compliments and all that sort of thing—it's the breath of life to her."

"But . . . but . . . did you kiss her?"

"No," said Kit firmly, "I didn't," he paused a moment. "Well, when I say I didn't . . . what I mean is . . . I only kissed her hand. Do you think that matters?" he asked, with a trace of anxiety in his voice.

"N . . . no," replied Amy thoughtfully, "I don't think hands ought to count, do you?"

## EPILOGUE

UPPINGTON never quite succeeded in solving the mystery of the little Christopher Browns.

Undoubtedly he had been mad : liable to sudden paroxysms of insanity, to violent and unprovoked attacks on his fellow-men. Most certainly he had been seen about with a keeper from whom he had escaped in a sensational and exciting manner. But exactly how he had been recovered—whether of his own free will he had returned home, or whether through the efforts of the police or the assiduity of Watts he had been restored to the bosom of his family—could never be determined. For Watts had been dismissed in a very cursory and most suspicious manner on the very day that Mr. Brown was reinstated at Elm Villa. According to Cook, he had merely returned to collect his luggage and to shrug his shoulders evasively. All the information that could be got out of him was to the effect that Mr. Brown was a fair corf-drop and no error.

It was suggested that Dr. Bennett had made another of his egregious mistakes, but Mrs. Brown, when approached on the subject, had nothing but honeyed words to speak of the doctor, who had



been, it appeared, everything that was kind, clever, and helpful : she had hinted, moreover, that she valued his discretion almost as much as his professional advice.

There remained only one other explanation of the mystery, and that one so extraordinary and incredible that for a long time no one at all would consider it seriously.

However, Mrs. Sutherland, having worked so hard, and having achieved so much, was not likely to allow the fruits of her labours to go unrecognized, nor her beloved religion to lose any kudos, which was due to it. It was soon known to all the members of her Church that she had performed one of the most marvellous cures in the annals of C.S. history ; and it was also whispered that, as usual, Mortal Mind was putting in its oar, and refusing to give honour where honour was due. It was a well-known and regrettable fact that most people who were cured by C.S. generally tried to pretend that their recovery was due to something else, and the fact that Christopher Brown had not openly joined the Church and made a public confession of the benefits which he had received from it was only another instance of the ingratitude of the unregenerate.

But they did their best to advertise the miracle that Mrs. Sutherland had been able to accomplish. They related the whole story with much elaborate detail to any and everybody who would listen to it. And whereas, when Kit was considered mad, they had strenuously denied the existence of madness, now that he was cured they insisted with equal

vehemence on how very mad he had been. They enlarged on his terrible fits of mania, his uncontrollable violence and his murderous propensities: no one had ever been so fatally and dangerously mad as Mr. Brown was before C.S. took him in hand and saved him from being committed to a lunatic asylum for the rest of his days.

It was indeed a great and glorious triumph for C.S.

And the attitude of Mr. Brown himself did nothing to detract from it. He had been heard to say that in his opinion Christian Science was a very sound idea, and that as a matter of fact it was what he had always, more or less, believed himself. There was too much fuss made about sin, so he said. It was absurd to talk about it as though it were a solid thing like a heavy weight, hanging round a man's neck. Sin, in itself, was merely a mistake of judgment, which should be forgotten as soon as possible and banished from the mind. Truth and Love, on which the Scientists set such store, were, he believed, very excellent things, which certainly made for the happiness of the human race, if exploited with discretion: that is to say, if you took care to love the right people, and to tell the right amount of truth at the proper time.

Although he did not, he said, feel that he was inclined actually to adopt C.S. himself, there could be no doubt that it was a splendid thing for other people; and, if at any time Amy wished to join that Church, he should not raise the slightest objection to her doing so.

Amy, however, never took advantage of this broad-

mind and tolerant view on her husband's part. With admirable tact she succeeded in keeping on the best of terms with both Mrs. Sutherland and her dear doctor. She knew that both of them, whatever their failings or their idiosyncrasies might be, had tried their utmost to help her in a time of trouble. And she believed, in her little simple, foolish way, that all love comes straight from the same Heaven above, even if it is labelled differently when it gets to the earth below, and that provided you have the Real Thing it doesn't much matter what you call it—which, in our opinion, is to arrive by a short cut at a very sound conclusion.

THE END







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